

POT AU FEU

William

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CROTCHETY STORIES

A

A SECRET IDYLL

IT was called a love-match, and correctly, as the term is used, for neither of the pair surveyed the prospect in the light of reason, and the impecunious party to the contract was not at all inspired by love of gain. Yet the impulse towards the Honourable Basil Franklin which his bride accepted for true love was, in sooth, no more than flesh and blood's response to his impassioned pleading; and when he ceased to woo, and life resumed routine, the impulse of affection languished, and she felt defrauded. It did not help Veronica to know that thousands envied her position as wife to the eldest son of the great banker, a prospective peeress. She wished now that she could have been a poor man's wife, sharing his burdens, rising by his side, feeling herself of use as his companion. Basil's one thought was to keep care from her. Was she pensive for a minute he would ask what ailed her, and when she strove, for occupation, to control the household, he cried out in pain :

“Why do I keep a housekeeper except to spare you all that?”

He wished to see her in a fool's paradise, idle-handed and for ever smiling; and because his likes

or dislikes were to her indifferent, she smiled on all around her in the mental posture of a tired sightseer.

Her lot, she supposed and also gleaned from books she read, was but the common one of women. As a child she had been taught that earthly joys are vain, that heaven is the soul's true home, and so forth—things doubted at the time, but now believable. In heaven, at any rate, there was neither marrying nor giving in marriage, which meant (she naively thought) that every soul was free to seek its perfect helpmeet. Her happiness lay there.

Not until the birth of a child, in the eighth year of her married life, did her mind change. New kindness then informed the conduct of her friends; new beauty clothed the furniture of her bedroom. The house, which had seemed till then so vast and dreary, acquired a soul and wore the look of home. True happiness had come to earth at last, as the star fell down into the well at Bethlehem. It dwelt now in her bosom, independent of external grievance, a happy thought enlivening and sustaining. She saw the humour in her husband's fussiness, and lay in bed and laughed at him till he responded. When she was well enough to go abroad once more, her friends remarked upon the great improvement, finding her easy to get on with, who had been so difficult.

It was then, at a social function, one of the first which she attended, that a man was brought to her—at his own request, she gathered from the murmur of the hostess in introduction. He fell into a chair at her side, and they began to converse in the prescribed desultory way, with an ear, for manners, to the digital gymnastics of a pianist. The tones of his voice

charmed her, penetrating at once to those recesses of the heart reserved for friendship. Surprised at some word of his which left her mind dubious between joke and earnest, she sought his eyes and, meeting them, became at once his intimate.

They were talking in the depths as old friends, happy in an affinity of ideas and foibles, when her husband, appearing at her side, declared the show a nuisance, and announced his wish to go. She rose at once, and left her new-found friend.

On the drive home with Basil, she inquired: "Who was that man who came and sat by me? I failed to catch his name. You seemed to know him."

"Dennison — rather an ass," came the careless reply.

"You astonish me. I found him very nice. He asked for leave to come and see me, and I said he might."

"Oh, he's clever enough, and has the gift of the gab. I've known the man by sight for years, and don't dislike him. But he's a fool in some ways — half an Irishman, which may account for it. He talks nonsense in all companies — thinks it's clever, I suppose."

Veronica reflected.

"You are right," she said. "A wise man should talk nonsense only to his peers."

"Humph!" snorted Basil dubiously, perceiving a double edge to her assent. She laughed and took his hand, assuring him she had not meant it so, had judged her new friend really ill-advised to loose his fancy often in the set they moved in.

From that time forward, John Dennison apper-

tained to her life. He was her chosen among men, and she gave him hearty friendship, secure in the contentment of her motherhood from thought of ill. Her husband, more and more immersed in business as the health of his father, old Lord Lombard, failed, in virtual command of the great bank, was tolerant of a friendship which amused her—a friendship conducted with such high discretion that the object never gave to it in thought a dearer name. She even fancied he was pleased at her preferring Dennison, a man near his own age, to any of the youthful fops of their acquaintance.

The whole history of her new friend's life was soon elicited, and she gave to it a consideration out of all proportion to its interest. His father, like her own, had been a country parson. He had been educated at one of the less expensive public schools, whence, following a natural bent, he had gone to Paris instead of to Oxford, and at the age of three-and-twenty had been known to experts as one of the three or four young English painters who gave splendid promise. Then a relative whom he had never seen had left to him a fortune more than ample for his tastes, and his art languished. He still kept a studio, and painted sometimes when the mood was on him. But for thirteen years his work had not been serious, by his own confession; his energies had been dispersed in other fields.

"You must work in earnest now," she told him, and he answered, "Rather!"

During the greater part of the year he dwelt in Jermyn Street, sharing a suite of rooms with a pipe-smoking, virile individual named Holt, his closest

friend for years. She questioned him concerning Mr Holt and asked that he should be brought to see her. John Dennison shook his head and laughed.

"I'll try," he said, "but I gravely doubt if I can manage it. At forty my friend Holt is a confirmed 'old' bachelor. When I'm not there he dines at a restaurant or his club. He never pays a call if he can help it. He has arranged life his own way, and excludes the better sort of women as far as possible; though he has other views for me. He is always urging me to marry."

"Indeed?" she laughed merrily, scenting a comic foe in Mr Holt, "and what would be this strange duenna's choice for you?"

"Some fledgeling fresh from the schoolroom. My friend is eighteenth century in all his notions. Anything but domesticated himself, he condemns his own faults in others—as a citizen, you understand, and for the common weal. He is so particular in talk to ladies that he finds practically nothing left that would be safe to say to them. That, I believe, is why he shuns their company and talks to barmaids."

"I should very much like to know him," said Veronica.

The opportunity came quite unexpectedly. One morning, at the end of the London season, when she was putting things away preparatory to the move into the country, Mr Dennison was announced, and she went down to him. From his hesitation and the colour of his face it was clear that he had something strange to tell.

"I hardly know how to represent it to you without offence," he faltered; "but my friend Holt—I told

you how he eggs me on to marry—well, he has got a notion that my friendship here is in the way, and last night he read me a lecture. I shut him up. But this morning, at breakfast, he said something which makes me fear that he intends to call on you—perhaps to appeal to your better nature, as he did to mine.” He laughed despairingly. “Do, please, remember that he is the best of souls—nothing but a sense of duty could have screwed his courage up to this tremendous ordeal—and don’t be hard on him, though he’ll deserve it.”

“When may I expect this honour?” asked Veronica. “You may trust me to be friendly to a friend of yours.”

“I should say, from my knowledge of him, half-past three, before the rush of visits.”

“I shall be very pleased to see him,” she said gaily.

But, when Mr Holt actually entered her presence, she felt strangely nervous. It was such a new sensation to feel herself regarded as a social syren. But, perceiving that her visitor was no less embarrassed, she recovered calm, shook hands with him and bade him take a seat before her.

He wore a grey frock-coat, buttoned closely as against assault, and for the rest was a middle-aged Englishman of the sturdy, bull-necked type inclined to redness. He laid his hat and stick on the ground, then picked them up again, before he found his tongue.

“Poor old Jack!” he opened fire without preliminary. “He thinks the world of you, Mrs Franklin. I’m worried about him these days. Used to be in to

meals like clockwork. Now he's away all day at that studio. He's out of sorts, of course, and needs a change. Yet he tells me he's going to stick in London all through August. I'd reckoned we were going north together for the grouse as usual."

He laid a hand to his forehead, seeming really at his wit's end.

"He's hard at work on a picture, I know," said Veronica lamely. She had promised herself much fun at Mr Holt's expense, but in his actual presence found herself absurdly eager to win the esteem of one so plainly honest.

"I should like Jack to marry," he flung out abruptly.

"So should I," she replied, "if it would make him happy. But example is better than precept, Mr Holt. You are older than he is, you should lead the way."

Holt's redness deepened, he turned his neck uneasily in the confining collar, and gave vent to a sound like "Pshaw!"

"I'm different," he condescended to explain. "I'm no hand at mincing—best alone with men. But he's cut out for it. He's been like a young brother to me all these years, I've looked sharp after him. And now there's something up—a woman, somewhere. Wish I could see a way to save him, but I don't at present."

That was the nearest he approached to accusation. He spoke of Newmarket, of the Eton and Harrow match, and then departed. Yet it was only when Jack Dennison laughed uncontrollably over her account of the interview that she beheld the fun of it.

"Dear old Tom!" cried Dennison. "He always regards my painting as a wicked waste of time. Even if I grew famous, he would think the same, merely adding that it was a mad world!"

He was fairly on the way to being famous. His income touched the hearts of dinner-loving academicians who soon enrolled him an associate of their body, when they saw he wrought in earnest.

His work now, in distinction to his earlier efforts, had a mystical quality critics failed to define. By some he was identified with the Neo-Celtic school, while others called him a disciple of the early Tuscan masters. The faces of his women in particular were peculiar, some said unnatural, in their strained eagerness. Veronica heard the point debated with much private glee, knowing that she, and no other, was his inspiration. In his choice of models he was often moved solely by some fancied resemblance she herself derided, in his choice of a subject always by her known enthusiasms. He became a full-blown academician in the same year that Basil succeeded to the peerage. The accident of family mourning prevented her from celebrating the occasion as she could have wished.

Then came a season of great grief for her. Her boy of seventeen fell ill at school, was moved to the sanatorium and there died just half an hour after his mother, summoned by telegram, reached his bedside. The blow completely felled her for some days, till she found her way to the thought that what had happened might be best, as for her love. The boy was spared so many trials she had feared for him.

Already, ere he died, there had been symptoms of that estrangement which is inevitable between mother and son. Now he was all her own, awaiting her in that heaven in whose existence she preserved a childlike faith. During that time she saw nothing of John Dennison. The matter of her grief did not concern him. She had always kept the boy away from him, moved by a feeling near to jealousy, and once, when he produced a costly present for the boy, had been quite angry. She replied to his epistle of condolence in the usual form, and as soon as the wound of her heart was cicatrised, resumed her sovereign interest in all his doings.

But then her husband had a serious fall out hunting, and was confined to his country home for eighteen months before he died. And all that while she never saw John Dennison. He wrote to her once a week and she replied. Her letters concerned the doings of her invalid, while his discoursed of art and general news. Only once did he venture on more private ground, and then it was to tell her that his friend, Tom Holt, approved of her late conduct and had lost suspicion. In reply she sent her best remembrances to Mr Holt; and that was all. Yet when her husband died, and she was set at liberty, she knew that his coming to her was only a question of months.

In fact, a twelvemonth later, as she sat in the drawing-room of the town house which was hers for life, the evening after her return from Italy, her friend approached her, seeming awkward, at a loss for words. She let him take her hand, but still words failed him; so, after waiting for some time,

oppressed by noises from the street without, she took the lead from him, and thus began:—

“Jack”—she used the pet name for the first time—“I think I know what is in your mind, and my thoughts are not far from yours. But—dear, we’re so old! I’m fifty-one this month.”

At that he thundered forth in praise of her, his fifty-three years lost in an eruption of eighteen. He would sooner, he declared, have her at seventy than Helen of Troy or Aphrodite herself.

“Then so be it,” she smiled assent at last. “And yet my heart misgives me. We’ve been so happy all these years, I fear disturbance. Now, Jack”—her tones grew pleading—“I am going to marry you but on one condition: that you obey me in all that concerns our future relationship—in the world’s eyes, I mean. I’ve been thinking all these months I’ve been alone. . . . To begin with, I enact that our marriage be kept secret from all who know us for at least one calendar month after its celebration.”

He agreed of course.

They went down to the fishing village in North Wales of which her father had been rector, and were married in the village church. No one in the place recalled Veronica, and their names meant nothing to the black-a-vised Welsh curate who performed the ceremony. She showed him her old haunts and tried to make him learn some words of Welsh. For a fortnight they were happy as small children are. But one afternoon he caught her looking sad.

“What is it, love?” he whispered in concern.

“It is that I have something particular to say to you, if I can bring it out. I’ve been putting it off for

days through sheer cowardice. It seems like a kind of murder, we're so happy. But I'm sure it's for the best. And it will be easier now than if I left it till quite the last to spring on you, poor boy! . . . Know, then"—she mocked the heroical, half weeping—"I decree that, on the expiration of this glorious month, our honeymoon, we return to our old ways; become just as we were before."

She went on hurriedly, to forestall his rising protest: "Jack, all I ask of you is just to think. You'll see the sense in it if you will only think. I've been a hope to you so many years, and you've been a hope to me. Don't let us give ourselves the chance to tire of one another. Rest content with the memory of one perfect month. I'm old, dear. Soon there will be no joy in life with me. By and by, if I lived, there would be disgust——"

She paused, awaiting his answer with a frightened air; then added as a last appeal—

"Remember the condition; you promised!"

All he could say was: "Give me time to think!"

He went and walked upon the shore an hour, between the slaty mountains and the sea. All was veiled and grey; the clouds were knit in sadness more than menace; the sea lisped soothingly along the mighty stretch of sand; the waves swam shoreward like white hounds straining. At first Veronica's proposal was entirely repugnant to him, but the more he pondered it the more it shone to him. It was the logical outcome of so much that they had thought in common, and attracted by its very eccentricity. 'So he agreed.

The month ended, he returned to the old rooms in Jermyn Street.

"What, back again?" cried Holt. "Do you know, I half thought you were off to get married?"

"You think a deal too much!" was the retort.

The old intercourse with Veronica was resumed, and in a very short while she saw him taking the old pleasure in it. She came sometimes to tea at his studio, and spent the hour of twilight with him, chatting intimately. A frequent visitor at her house, he was amused to see the servants puzzled by his lengthy courtship. When she went abroad or to the sea, he always managed to visit the same spot.

Once, on his return from a south German watering-place, Holt, grown a puffy old codger, met him with a sour face.

"Look here, Jack!" he said irritably. "I've been hearing things—talk—I don't like, about you and that old divinity of yours. I heard a fellow say that Lady Lombard is a woman by nature corrupt, and won't let you marry her because she likes the taste of scandal. They say you've besought her to make you 'an honest man,' and she won't. It's mostly lies, of course, but I hate to hear it. The women, of course, are at the root of it; some of 'em have never got over her bagging poor Lombard. Come, Jack, marry the woman, and stop their mouths."

"Don't be ridiculous, Tom!" Dennison laughed. "Why, the marriage service would be a farce at our age! Where can be the harm in two old people going their own way, in spite of the world?"

At that Holt grew purple in the face.

"Well, I must say," he spluttered, "I never thought

to hear you put forth such immoral doctrine. You used to be rather squeamish, I considered. . . . Artists get slack ; I suppose it's the naked women in the studios. But I never dreamt of this. Why, my dear fellow, *I'm* scandalised, devilish shocked, to hear you ; and—God forgive me !—I'm a man of the world, not what you'd call straitlaced."

"Won't you take my word for it that there's no harm between us, nothing whatever to offend your sense of decency ?"

"Then why the devil can't you marry her ? I wish you would. It gives such colour to the talk I hear."

When Dennison retailed this conversation to his wife, her joy was great. The thought of tongues wagging thus concerning them gave the elderly couple a delicious thrill in common.

Tongues wagged loud and fierce when, two years later, John Dennison, the famous painter, fell ill, and Lady Lombard ordered his removal to her own house, and nursed him herself unremittingly. It was taken as confirming much that had been whispered in the past. Well-meaning gossips suddenly became inspired with the knowledge that Veronica had loved this Dennison when quite a girl, and then been forced into the Lombard match by an ambitious father. That was some excuse for her attachment to him. But no one could produce any plausible reason for her failure to marry him on Lombard's death. An explanation, under bond of secrecy, passed at this time between Veronica and Mr Holt, to lay to rest the latter's scruples against coming to the house. He begged her to announce the marriage, and grew huffy at her refusal ; but all the same he went away

with lighter step, and thenceforth was unruffled by the clack of slanderous tongues.

Scandal might do its worst, Veronica declined to break the ring of silence which preserved a sanctuary for herself and Jack. The talk, indeed, amused her, going wide of the mark. Its touch upon the truth had been pollution. She had been Basil's wife before the world; she was Jack's wife in a wholly different sense. In heaven this would be recognised, she felt assured. But the brutal world would say, "She married twice," seeing no difference between this and that. Therefore the world must not know.

Once, when alone with her patient, she said dreamily :

"Do you know, Jack, I half hope you'll die now, quickly!" She knelt beside the bed with cheek upon his hand, which lay limp and bony on the coverlet. "It sounds dreadful, and would be abominable from any one else. But you understand, don't you? You've seen how old I'm getting. I should like you to die while I can still hold my head straight and retain the use of my hands, while your kind eyes see not much change in me from the woman you loved. Then you'll welcome me in heaven."

"I should do that anyhow—if there is a heaven."

"Oh, there is one, never doubt it, love!"—his doubts had always filled her with a gentle horror—"Think of all earth's promise unfulfilled, and can you doubt it? There is something in us both, as young as ever, which must live on. Our bodies age, but not our souls. I feel that every hour of every day. I fancy heaven will be something like your pictures."

"Silly girl!"

"Girl!" she groaned, and wept a little for the years gone by.

He died in her arms one summer evening when the voice of the town sounded weary through the open windows, and the London sparrows chirped their loudest in the sunset glow. All at once the patter of feet below, the jingle of passing cabs whose wheels ran muffled on the straw before the house—all the well-known tolerated sounds rang utterly senseless and heartless for the survivor. The melody was gone, and what remained to live for?

She wished to die, but she lived on for years, while infirmities grew upon her. It was quite ten years later, on a sunny morning in mid-winter, when she was being wheeled along the front at Brighton, a hired companion walking by her chair, that she recognised with joy a figure in the crowd.

"Mr Holt!" she called out shrilly.

A decrepit old fogey, well-nigh mummified in wraps, turned his stiff neck at the call, and came to her.

"Mr Holt, can't you recall my face? You have never forgotten our dear Jack Dennison?"

"Bless my soul!" the old fellow exclaimed, straightening his frame preparatory to a superb bow. "My dear Lady Lombard, how are you? This is an unexpected pleasure. Hope your health keeps good."

"Just counting the hours till I meet Jack in heaven, Mr Holt."

The old gentleman started as if he had been shot, and, looking inexpressibly shocked, muttered: "Dear, dear! . . . Dear, dear!"

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"Don't you believe in heaven, Mr Holt?"

"Er— My dear Lady Lombard! What a question in a public place! . . . Yes, yes; I do, in a way. But not like that, God bless me!—nothing half so dreadful."

Just then the hired companion sidled up to him and whispered: "Odd at times. Her brain rambles unintelligibly. An infirmity of age."

Veronica, though of a truth infirm, could see and hear things passing close beside her. She saw the old man's smile of understanding and the little shrug of the shoulders, with which he added in a louder voice:

"Of course I believe in heaven, Lady Lombard. Hope to meet Jack there myself, if my sins let me. Hope we shall all get there, to be sure. Good-bye, my dear lady. Hope to see you again. I often walk here in the mornings."

And, as he tottered off, she knew what he was muttering to himself:

"Devilish sad . . . wreck of a fine woman. . . . A good thing Jack can't see her now—poor old soul!"

DRIED LAVENDER

IT was the moment of sunset. Miss Hurd was busy with a watering-pot in the little garden before her cottage. There was a square grass-plot on each side of a gravelled path which led from a white gate in a low wall; and in the centre of each plot there was a round bed, gay in the one case with geraniums, in the other with petunias. Two trim yew hedges, like blinkers, screened the lower windows of the house from all sidelong distraction, confining their outlook to the road, and that which lay beyond the road—a hedge of hawthorn, to wit, and a rising ground bearing a windmill and a cottage.

Thus far the garden was all precision. But a deep border along the house-front was planted with old-fashioned flowers of the kind which the knowing call "herbaceous." Tall hollyhocks were there of every shade from crimson to pure white, a number of bushy plants out of bloom, a sunflower or two, and twin shrubs of lavender flanking the white doorstep. Lower growths of mallow, carnation, sweet-william, ministered to the appearance of a flowering thicket. This wild fringe to a garden whose primness would else have made the eyes ache had its analogy, it may be, in the spinster's heart. She had once hinted as

much to her admirer and frequent visitor, Farmer Willing, when he censured its luxuriance.

"This stands for sentiment, William. An old maid may be pardoned a touch of it, may she not?"

But Mr Willing, having no leaning to investigate character beyond the bare good or bad, without following up a hint so luminous, had pounced at once upon the words "old maid," a needless stigma; he had been ready any time these thirteen years to remove it.

The sun passed from sight. The grass and the flowers took on profounder hues as the waters of the twilight covered them. From the straggling village rose a murmur pointed with shouts and cries, human-kind twittering with the hedgerow birds in the relief of the hot day ended. The windmill from being black against the glow, was become mystically white of a sudden. The smoke of a wood-fire curling upwards from the flushed horizon had a magic softness. It recalled to Miss Hurd the picture of Noah's sacrifice in an old Bible she had inherited. She paused a moment, contemplating it, then went to refill her can at the water-butt.

A man came down the path by the windmill, which led from cornfields—a bronzed being of uncertain age, clad in a faded blue shirt and corduroy trousers strapped below the knee, an amorphous coat across his shoulder, a wide-awake hat crushed down upon his face. As he clambered over the stile into the road, the neat figure of the lady, leather-gloved and garden-hatted, met his sight. His eyes kindled humorously, not without a spark of pity.

He winked aside, over his shoulder, as it might be to his guardian angel.

"She can't a heard the news," he thought, discovering no trace of disturbance about her. And moved by a laudable wish to see how she would take it, he pulled up respectfully before the white gate and wished her good-evening.

"Good-evening, George; and how is your wife?"

His wife was a thought better, and he thanked the Lord for it, though still very moderate. He stood at ease, leaning on the gate.

"What beautiful weather!" she remarked.

He assented, subjoining a hope that it might hold on till the harvest was in. Then, after a pause, touching his hat to excuse the opening of a new topic:

"Mr Ned is home again, Miss, as I dessay you've heard."

Plainly she had known nothing of it; her start and the hand pressed suddenly to her side were convincing. The rustic relished his importance as first bearer of such tidings.

"Ah, pore feller," he went on with unction. "He's mighty changed to what he used to be. He's been at the ale'us all day, so they tell me, drinkin' stiff. He'll be ragin' drunk by night, and up to mischief I'll be bound."

"But surely Mr Hill has no right to serve a man in that state. There is a law against it. At the first sign of drunkenness, he should turn him out; it is the duty of every publican."

The labourer inwardly blessed her innocence for supposing that any licensed victualler would hinder

a man with money in his pocket from running up a long score, even though an abstract justice might be frowning. But he only said :

“Maybe you’re right. I know nought o’ the law myself.” Then, seeing the distress of her hands, he added :

“Don’t you take on, Miss Jenny. He’s a bad un. And to be sure he didn’t ought to be let to get drunk, that he didn’t. It’s a shame! Ah! Publics is the ruin of a many, rich and poor. It’s to be wished they were ’bolished, the Lord forgive ’em, and that’s the truth. And I wish you good-night!”

With which and a pull of the forelock, he resumed his way to the Bell Inn, whose sign, bowered in the leaves of a sycamore, was discernible at a turn of the road. Ned Warden was a famous toper, the talk of the district. To have observed him in his frenzy constituted a title to consideration for a man.

The shades gathered fast. The sky beyond the windmill was feathered pink on palest green. Miss Hurd, having put away her watering-pot, went into the parlour. Looking out through the flowery screen, she presently saw William Willing lift the latch of the white gate. His feet scrunched the gravel; he rang the front-door bell.

A man past his prime, slightly bowed, with iron-grey hair like a halo about his shaven face. Hat, coat, knee-breeches, leggings—all were grey as though dusted with flour. You would have taken him for a miller in the half light. Even his boots were grey with the dust of the road, but this he was careful to flick off with a handkerchief before crossing the threshold. On most evenings of the week, he

paid a call on Miss Hurd ; his sober devotion to her was proverbial in the neighbourhood.

She would play a game of bezique with him under the chaperonage of an aged servant engaged in needlework. And then she would escort him with old-world courtesy to the gate, plucking a flower or sprig of lavender by the way and arranging it in his button-hole. They were not gentlefolks, he being a farmer, she a miller's daughter ; but they preserved the manners of the eighteenth century.

This evening, however, there was no question of a game between them, nor of a chaperone.

After complimenting her on her garden and hearing her good wishes for his farm, he took the hand which lay listless in her lap, saying gently as one who breaks distressful tidings :

"Ned is in the village, Jane ; he will come to you. I desire you will be firm."

A feeble pressure of his hand was the response.

"Not to-night : I do not think he will come to-night. I believe—I hope he has not fallen so low as that ! He is at Hill's now, roaring—a disgrace. . . . Listen !"

He raised a hand to his ear.

A light wind had risen, rustling leaves and stirring plumes of dust upon the road. It brought a sound of hoarse singing at the pitch of a voice which sounded blasphemous in that peaceful hour. The song broke off and was succeeded by uproarious shouts of laughter.

"All the worst of the village are with him, and he's standing treat—has money, so 'tis said. Been sponging on some old friend, I suppose."

In spite of the softness of his tone, Mr Willing directed a keen, almost a stern glance upon the face of his companion, which was turned away. She had given money to Ned Warden more than once, he knew; and he suspected her now with an inward wail for the sex's gullibility. But the hand which lay in his did not tremble; she appeared not to have caught the impeachment of his tone. A little after, to his infinite consternation, he grew aware that she was sobbing.

"Jane!" he murmured, his voice shaken with concern. "Can it be that you still think kindly of that ruffian after all he has made you suffer? You have only to look at him to know what he is—bloated, bleary-eyed, a drunkard!"

The comparison and reproach implied were obvious. "Can you prefer a man like that to a sober, well-conducted person like your William? And faithful as I have proved myself to be! It is preposterous!"

Her sobbing aloud turned him abruptly from thoughts of self.

"You are unwell," he said, pressing her hand. "The air has been close to-day; I have felt it myself. Would you rather I went away?"

A droop of her head giving assent, he took up his hat and passed out, turning at the door to look back at her with eyes of pain. The white gate, however, saw indignation once more in the ascendant. Farmer Willing buttoned his coat right up to the neck, a way he had when at a loss. Most men would have shrugged their shoulders, some even might have sworn roundly.

Night came, and the house was shut up, but Miss Hurd had no thought of repose. The old servant supposing her in her room, had gone tranquilly to bed under that impression. She sat in the parlour without a light, and the darkness seemed lurid and livid by turns to her aching eyes.

In feeling, she was a girl again, mourning her lover's desertion. Memory and imagination combined had made a fair picture of the happiness she had missed, and to this she had remained faithful through the years despite the solicitude of Mr Willing and others. By degrees her charm, and with it the hope of aspirants, left her. What sweetness she retained was like the aroma of pressed lavender, the prevailing odour of the house, a diffused fragrance no longer centred in her person. William alone persisted—more from force of habit, she told herself, than from active affection. There was no hope for him.

She clung to her dream-picture, her corner of sentiment, her wild border—things beyond his comprehension, which fretted him as she had noticed more than once. Besides she was now an old maid, wedded to the routine of her quiet life. The mere thought of change was scaring.

“Bloated, blear-eyed, a drunkard! . . .”

The revolting image was before her eyes. And, mingled with her loathing of that fearful contrast to her memory of the face it painted, was annoyance with the man who had not scrupled to pollute her mind with such a portrait. It recurred again and again with anguish. There was no driving it away.

A purring noise in the darkness startled her. But

it was only the clock on the mantelpiece nerving itself to the stroke of eleven. She sighed for the lateness of the hour, opening eyes of wonder on herself.

She had risen and was groping on the table for the box of matches and the candlestick which were there, when she became aware of an uproar on the road without. It drew nearer—snatches of song out of tune, whooping, shouting and drunken laughter.

Her house was the last of the village, and stood alone. In passing it the roysterers could have no object save expressly to annoy her. Such a thing had never occurred before; she could not but connect the insult with Ned Warden. Trembling, she sank back into her chair. The house was dark, she reflected with thankfulness; no one could tell that she was up and awake.

Her pet name was bawled with an oath, as the gate flew noisily open. Heavy footfalls crushed the gravel. The curses, the wild laughter sounded so near that she almost fancied they were in the room with her. Her heart beat fiercely, her brain worked in throbs.

At the fall of a heavy body, crushing flower-stems, the mirth became more boisterous.

"Let him lie! Never mind him! He's drunk!" said a husky voice loudly. There seemed to be some weight on the speaker's tongue.

The house-bell was rung furiously. Someone beat upon the door with a stick.

"Open, Jenny! . . . Darling, it's me, Ned—brought a few friends to drink your health! Let me in, you old —, or I'll—— . . ."

For hours, as it seemed to her, she suffered martyrdom. As one frozen in the act to rise, she sat forward, upright, a hand on each arm of the chair, forced to hear her name sullied with filthy adjectives, bandied in obscene jests. And the man for whose sake she had vowed herself to perpetual maidenhood, he it was who put her to this torture.

At length an upper window was flung up, and the voice of the old servant rose shrill above the din, crying shame on them for a pack of cowards. Her speech ended in a cry of "Police!" which daunted the drunkards, although to the sober it was probable that the sole constable of the neighbourhood lay snug in bed in his cottage three miles off. The knocking at the door ceased, but the bell was rung more wildly than ever out of bravado.

"For God's sake, come away, Ned! You'll get run in for this, and I shall lose my licence! Come off, I tell ye, or I'll give ye in charge meself."

It was the voice of Hill the publican, just arrived upon the scene. He likewise had drunk far more than was good for him, but terror for his licence cleared his brain.

"Come along, can't ye? There's men comin'. All the village is astir. Come on, I say! Here's a constable!"

That was the end of it. There followed helpless stumbling on the gravel, a fall or two, oaths, and then the gate was slammed, the place was quiet once more. But the silence restored brought little solace to Miss Hurd, after the first sigh of physical relief. Her privacy, her secret heart had been invaded,

trampled, desecrated on the pattern of the border outside.

She retired to her chamber but could not sleep. Dawn found her lying on her bed full dressed, and she welcomed its greyness at the window as a call to rise. Her first care was for her garden, to see what damage had been done. Among the broken stems of the hollyhocks a man's form lay dew-drenched. He snored as she bent over him, and the snore had a hiccup in it. It was the same who had been first to inform her of Ned's presence in the village. He had a sick wife and four small children at home; she noted the fact with the coolness of a doctor making diagnosis. She was past horror or surprise.

The man was rheumatic; a whole night's exposure would very likely cripple him for life. Her practical mind embraced the probability without compassion. Hot tea occurring to her as a possible preventative, she went to prepare it in the dim kitchen with just as much concern for her patient as is felt by a paid nurse. When at length she carried out the teapot and a mug into the garden, the man was gone. Prints of his heavy boots went zigzagging across the grass; a petunia in the centre bed was down-trodden; the white gate hung open.

It was Sunday morning. Folks slept regardless of the sun. The windmill, rosy in the first rays, was rigid, cutting the pale sky-line clearly, as if it stood guard over space. An oppressive calm was everywhere, born of the associations of a lifetime. Even had she not known for certain the day of the week, she thought she would have recognised the Sabbath in the air.

She stood still, teapot in one hand, mug in the other. The thought that she was up and at work so early on the Lord's Day stabbed a conscience trained to exalt the smaller matters of the law, and gave her the measure of the night's disturbance. Looking upon the wreck of her cherished flower-bed, it seemed impossible that she could ever resume her old placid existence.

She recognised her father's wisdom years ago in forbidding Ned Warden the house, her own folly in maintaining a secret correspondence with him. Ned had sworn her to faithfulness as a matter of course, little dreaming how earnest and tragic it all was to her. That faithfulness had become the spirit and the motive of her daily life, mixed up with her religion, a bright hope for the life to come founded on her prayers for him. Even now, after his gross insult, she scarcely repined. It was hers to suffer. Only as priestess of a temple did she feel indignant.

About eight o'clock a man turned in at the gate, looking mighty sheepish in his Sunday clothes. He had a bull neck, prominent eyes a little bloodshot, and a face rivalling beetroot in colour. The old servant who answered his ring at the bell eyed him with disfavour.

It was Hill the publican. He stood in the little entrance-hall, revolving his billycock-hat slowly and jerkily. A rough man whose every second word in a general way was unfit for a lady's ears, the necessity of keeping a sharp lookout ahead hampered his speech considerably. He had the impression of being before the justices, so great was the constraint upon him.

Mr Warden had been "run in"—"took up" he corrected himself. The rector as was a magistrate had heard the shindy and had come down with his coachman and the constable. Mr Ned had been took easy in a ditch where he had fallen, others with him. He was at present in the harness-room up at the rectory under lock and key. The speaker was of opinion that the reverend gent. wouldn't let him be moved of a Sunday. There was still time for his friends to beg him off.

Mr Hill trembled for his licence. He brought much evidence, hardly relevant, to support the reputation of his house. If the lady would only be so good as tell the reverend that the Bell was not to blame, nor yet its landlord! She must have heard him remonstrate with the rioters. It was he who had persuaded them to give over. He would pay for all the damage done to her garden and the paint of her front door; most gladly he would pay every farthing of it if she would but speak a word for him.

But Miss Hurd was adamant. Even his pathetic picture of Mr Warden, "as was almost a gentleman born," going to gaol like a common malefactor, and his friends lifting no finger to save him, failed to move her. It was Mr Hill's trump card. Having played it in vain, he went off sullenly, breaking out in curses as soon as he had passed the gate.

"A short term of imprisonment may do him good; it can do no harm."

They were her own words, and she exulted in them. They announced a new purpose, a new hope in her. The end, perhaps, had not been written to her life's romance.

The bells called her to church as usual at eleven o'clock. She took courage to waylay the parson afterwards, as he emerged from the vestry. What she had to say as he paced the church-path at her side was in the nature of a confession, but his demeanour was rather of the concerned friend than of the priest.

"My dear Miss Hurd, I admire your good sense. The disgrace and the enforced abstinence should rouse him. The bench has only fined him hitherto, on your account. Now I will speak to my colleagues. Someone must give him a chance when he comes out."

With a bow and a sympathetic pressure of the hand, he left her to hurry to his dinner.

At the churchyard-gate, Farmer Willing was in waiting to conduct her home. It was a privilege on which he counted every week. The walk through the village, or sometimes a longer round by field-paths, was prized for its perfect friendliness. Though few words passed, and those of the most conventional, it made Sunday a bright day for both of them.

But to-day she saw at a glance that her cavalier was out of temper. His face was red, his eyes agog, his mouth pursed sourly. She was careful to avoid his gaze, looking dreamily over the roofs of the village below them, over cornfields to a belt of woods which bounded the horizon.

"I should like to go by the fields, William," she said, quietly taking his arm. Her calm was in strong contrast with his bottled fury.

At the first stile, he exploded.

"Jane! Your weakness is surprising—shocking to me! After his disgraceful conduct of last night,

I should have thought you might have washed your hands of the fellow! A thorough scapegrace—bad blood—hopeless! 'Twas all I could do to keep still while you were begging the parson to let him off. You do him harm, not good! Gaol's the only place for him. Jane! My dear Jane!"—a pathetic note of appeal stole into his voice—"I have waited many years. Can you doubt my devotion to you? Choose now, I beseech you, once for all between plain, downright Bill Willing and that unprincipled——"

A straight glance of her eyes checked him.

"William," she said gently, "would you consent to make your house a home for Ned, if ever he fell ill?"

Her eyes were steadfast. He scratched his head in utter consternation and fell to considering a tuft of grass in the pathway.

"Answer me, William. Yes or no."

He understood that she was making a condition, and said bluntly:

"No, Jane. Not even for you."

"Then I can never marry you, William."

It was final. He felt himself befooled. He could have burst out in bitter invective at the unreason of her sex. Her talk was madness fit for Bedlam. To have spoken his mind would have been a relief much needed, for the veins upon his forehead threatened apoplexy. But he simply buttoned up his coat to the neck, and they walked along in silence, arm in arm.

BILLIAM

IN a field outside the Suffolk village of Carlton Ash, upon the London road—a field belonging to old Smith the grocer—a tent was pitched, from which at evening came the wheezy strains of a harmonium and the sound of many voices singing lustily; then much vociferation by a single voice, another hymn, more shouting. The on-coming twilight of a summer evening spread a bloom on the landscape of tilled fields and pasture, to which the hedgerow trees imparted something of a woodland character. Straight lines of smoke from hidden chimneys showed against the sky. On the five-barred gate of the field, which stood wide open, was the notice: "Mission Services! Now is the time! All are welcome!" A few late-comers hurried through the gate, across the trampled grass, and joined the congregation.

Inside the tent, some twenty rows of chairs, nearly all of them occupied, faced the harmonium, which would have looked like an altar with its lighted candles but for the feathered hat of the accompanist, Miss Daisy Smith, the grocer's daughter, and an occasional glimpse of her eyebrows, seen above it. Beside the harmonium stood the evangelist, one Nokes, an unctuous man with fat white face and fat

white hands, on one of which a thick gold wedding-ring showed forth uxoriously. His stentorian voice had a crack in it, which gave to its psalmodic tones a whirl not unlike the peculiar rattle of the corncrake. He had been in trade before the spirit moved him, and, even at his loudest, still preserved a something of the tradesman recommending wares, or so it seemed to one sceptical observer.

This critic was the Reverend Gilbert Pusey-White, the new High Church vicar of the parish, who, wishing to study every mood of his parishioners, after saying evening prayer in an empty church, had come on to the tent, to find it crowded. From a seat at the back he observed the proceedings, first with curiosity, then with a growing irritation. Why could not the preacher diversify his terms a little, instead of saying the same things, foolish things, over and over again.

"A blessing, O dear Lord, a blessing on every one of us here to-night—here in this village, in this field, in this tent—every one of us. . . . Stir our hearts—the heart of every one of us here to-night. . . . The story I am about to relate contains, I am sure, a message for every one of us here to-night."

This tiresome iteration made the vicar restive. He looked around for signs of inattention. None appeared. Every face that he could come at wore a rapt expression, the very backs expressed a kind of soulful gluttony.

"Every one of us here to-night!"—There it came again, that senseless catchword, in a prayer put up by someone at the call of the evangelist. It was Smith the grocer. He and his daughter, half the

people present, were church-goers. Being used to the dignified language of the Liturgy, how could they tolerate such trash as this? Yet the meeting was enthusiastic, the hymns were a triumph shout, the "Amens" and the "Glories" rang of rapturous applause. It struck him as a fearful orgy, mocking true religion; and he had almost summoned up the courage needed to slip out before the end, when, to his dismay, he heard his own name shouted by the preacher.

"I have just had my attention called to the presence among us here to-night of a gentleman who, however much he may differ from us in practices, is, I am sure, one with us in the blessing which we ask on every one of us here in this little tent, in this field to-night. I call upon the Reverend Pusey-White"—here Nokes the Evangelist raised himself upon his toes and peered in the direction pointed out by Smith the grocer—"I call on the Reverend Pusey-White, M.A., vicar of this parish, to say a few words and also give the closing prayer and blessing. I should have called on you before, sir"—here his accents were reproachful—"only I was not aware of your presence. All are welcome to our services, and I am sure that I may say that your presence is most gratifying to every one of us gathered here to-night."

Thus taken by surprise, the vicar got upon his feet and uttered the first words that came to him; to his disgust those words were echoes of the stuff he had been listening to for the last hour. His speech gave satisfaction, judging from the vigour of the Amens at its conclusion. He then led off the Lord's Prayer, gave the Benediction and, after a reverent

interval, moved to depart. Nokes the Evangelist rushed at him with arms extended.

"Oh, thank you, thank you, Mr Pusey-White, for those most blessed words. What a beautiful thought that the love is for every one of us here to-night. I pray that we may often hear your precious gift, sir, at these services ; which are strictly undenominational, I would have it known."

No sooner did he escape from the evangelist, than old Smith accosted him.

"Ah, sir, we thank you. You've done a deal o' good by comin'. Our old vicar, bein' Low, of course, comes reg'lar; but we never thought you'd come among us here to-night. They're nice friendly little services, and do a deal o' good among the workin'-class. You'll pardon the liberty I take, sir, but won't ye step in to a bit o' supper round at mine; Nokes the Evangelist is comin', and we've got a niceish ham?"

"I'm sorry I can't manage it this evening, Smith, but I'm already pledged to Mrs Devereux at the Hall."

"Oh, indeed, sir; and I hope she's bearin' up. A sad loss, poor Mr Devereux, last year. But the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away."

Released at length, the vicar posted to his house, and thence to the Hall, which he approached by the private path reserved for intimates. His hostess, a pale nervous blonde of twenty-three, looking frail and pathetic in her black dress without ornament, rose slowly out of a deep chair to greet him.

"The Warners couldn't come; I heard this morning," she informed him tragically. "I call it perfectly

horrid of them to disappoint us. So you'll have to put up with only me."

The vicar did not grasp the handle for a compliment, feeling too deeply to indulge in badinage.

"Well, what have you been doing lately?" she inquired.

"I come here fresh from a revival meeting, the first I ever went to in my life. The preacher spied me out and made me speak; which was a great deal more than I bargained for."

"Well, did you like it on the whole?—I mean the meeting."

"A mere travesty of a religious gathering! The man kept repeating himself everlastingly till the catchwords got on my nerves. 'Every one of us here to-night.'" He mimicked the tones of Mr Nokes's voice.

"I'm a little dull, I'm afraid. I can't see that words matter if the speaker was in earnest." His hostess's face assumed a pretty pained expression. "Mrs Cater assures me that this mission does a lot of good in the village."

"Mrs Cater would say anything!" was on the tip of his tongue to reply; Mrs Cater being an old lady of evangelical upbringing, who opposed all his innovations in her dread of popery. However, he held his peace, accepting the rebuke in the guise, if not the spirit, of a meek disciple. The widow's plaintive singing of old ballads after dinner, for him alone, atoned for everything.

Next evening, Thursday, closing the chancel-door as he came out from evensong, he saw her carriage pass the churchyard gate, and followed it with his

eyes along the London road, whose low-cut hedges only hid the wheels. It stopped before the tent. What could it mean? What madness! Could it be she really had a liking for that kind of thing? He hastened to the field, meeting on the way her empty carriage.

She was seated in the front row of chairs facing the harmonium, quite isolated, the seats adjacent having been deserted through reverence. She greeted him in her accustomed languid manner, remarking just as if no one else had been present :

“After what you said last night, I thought I might as well come and hear for myself.”

He took a seat in the row behind her and saw for the first time certain little curls on the nape of her neck beneath the mass of hair, curls exactly like thin shavings from a plank of deal. The simile was not poetic ; but the curls entranced him. Contemplating them he could endure the noisy hymns, the tiresome preacher, with patience, even with a certain pleasure. Then came an anecdote, the most inept that he had ever heard, an example of the crudest bathos, and so illogical that he had much ado not to disgrace himself by open jeers.

“Now I’m going to tell you a story,” bawled Nokes the Evangelist in his cracked voice. “There was once a poor man whom the Lord afflicted sorely. First, he lost his wife, then he lost his health ; and thirdly—he lost—a very valuable cow.”

The vicar watched the widow’s shoulders ; they were quite unshaken. Her self-control was greater than his own.

“Now,” Nokes continued, “that man—vay—ry sad,

vay—ry sorrowful—was walking along a road (as it might be the London road at Carlton Ash), and he saw a tent in a field (as it might be this tent, in which we are all assembled for a blessing, every one of us here to-night). And that poor man whom the Lord had afflicted drew near to that tent; and there was a meeting going on (as it might be this meeting); and the evangelist (as it might be myself) was saying these words: 'Faith, Hope, Charity—these three.'

"Well, when that poor man heard those blessed words, what do you think he did? He slapped his knee! He gave glory to God. He cried: 'I lost three good things, and now, by His grace, I've found three good things: Faith, instead of my wife; Hope, instead of my health; and Charity, instead of my very valuable cow.'"

Still Mrs Devereux preserved composure. As she leaned back, gazing up at the preacher, her picture hat concealed the charming curls.

"Now that simple tale has brought a blessing to many souls. Who knows but what it may touch the heart of one among us here to-night! Is there one here present who has been afflicted? Is there one who has suffered grievous sorrows, trials, losses more than it seems that feeble flesh can bear? Is there one, I ask you——"

A horrid snort, a hiccup and death-rattle all in one came suddenly from the back of the tent. The vicar sprang to his feet with the impression that some fellow-creature was in a fit. The whole assembly was moved. There ensued a noise of loud, heart-breaking sobs. Horror set its mark on every face save that of Nokes, which brightened visibly.

"Ah, poor soul! poor soul!" He bawled in triumph, with expanding smile. "Weep not, poor soul! Resist not the blessing! Let it flow in! Come forward, dear Christian brother, and tell us your experience for the joy of every one of us here to-night!"

From the back of the tent a man was hustled forward—a short, down-looking man, clad in the labourer's drab corduroy. Sandy whiskers made a frame nearly square for his red face going purplish towards the nose. His jaws and throat were working convulsively and tears rolled down his cheeks, while his lowered brow expressed distrust of everything and everybody:

"Why, it's Billiam!" exclaimed the vicar.

"Hush!" said Mrs Devereux.

Both had turned round in their seats to get a full view of the penitent. This Billiam was the scandal of the parish, a drinking, brawling lout, who had more than once half-murdered the wife whose work maintained him. The vicar had tried in vain to get the man to hear reason; and now here was Billiam moved to the depths of his amorphous nature, converted, made amenable, by the silliest, most pointless story man had ever heard.

"Fear not, dear brother!" coaxed Nokes the Evangelist. "Tell us your experience. All such testimony as yours is vay—ry precious. How did the blessing take you."

"That tuk me right here!" blurted the penitent gruffly, striking himself in the region of the waistcoat. Then as if the place had still retained some soreness from the spiritual impact, he began blubbering again,

exclaiming : " Them blessed words ; that's what done it. I fare whol—ly stammed. 'Faith, Hoop, and Cherrity' ! Aw dear ! Aw dear ! I got a wife myself, I hev, and health, I know ut ; but I niver did hev no vallyble cow." With that his feelings overcame him and he wept aloud, while Nokes the Evangelist, laying his fat hand with its thick gold ring on his shoulder, spoke words of comfort in a trumpet voice.

At length the contrite man was heard to murmur : " I'll be a Christun man, I will ! Strike me dead if I 'ont ; hinceforth and frivermore, Amen ! "

" Will you take the pledge, Billiam ? " asked Miss Daisy Smith, the grocer's daughter, insinuatingly from her post at the harmonium.

Billiam seemed a little staggered by this home-thrust ; but presently he lifted his shock head and glared round with the defiance of an angry bull.

" I'll dew ut ; I'll take the pledge, that's straight I will ; if so be "—he paused to give its weight to the condition—" if so be as anyone 'll take that 'long o' me."

" I will," said a gentle voice. The vicar could have screamed, he was so shocked and startled. There was a rustling. Mrs Devereux stood up. Nokes the Evangelist, in an ecstasy of gratitude seized the lady's hand in both of his. She had to tear it away.

" Poor stricken soul ! " he cried. " Here is an honour for you ! This most generous, most truly Christian lady consents to take the pledge with you."

" Aw, dontee trouble, mum ! " faltered Billiam with a kind of sheepish horror.

" I will. I should love to help you," said the lady sweetly.

The evangelist, well used to such emergencies, exacted the necessary bond from both of them to abstain from every kind of alcoholic liquor for the space of twelve calendar months. And then the final words were said, a hymn was sung, and, having given time for Mrs Devereux to depart, the congregation poured out slowly with a murmur of congratulation.

Nokes the Evangelist seized both the vicar's hands and squeezed them tenderly, exclaiming: "Ah, my dear sir, I have to thank you for a plenteous blessing. I understand that it is owing to your kindness that this dear, gracious—this most Christian lady—became interested in our humble work. It is a precious work and fruitful, as you have seen among us here to-night. And alas! we stand in need of fresh subscribers."

When the young clergyman escaped at last he was surprised to see Mrs Devereux's carriage still waiting at the gate of the field.

"Do hurry up!" its owner called to him; and when he came, she added: "I'll give you a lift to the vicarage. Please get in." She moved a little, making place beside her.

"What on earth possessed you——?" he was beginning. But she was ready for him and broke in at once:

"Now don't be cynical and disagreeable. If you still maintain these meetings do no good, after what we saw just now—that touching sight!—I shall think you're jealous that they do more good than you can."

"Jealous!—when you heard that story?"

"Why, what was wrong with it? It served its purpose."

"Well, the valuable cow as lastly, for one little thing!"

"What does it matter in what order he put the troubles; it was very sad."

"And then the logic! Faith, Hope, and Charity, abstract things, made equivalent to wife, health, cow, material things."

"Oh, one can't be bothered to be so critical as all that! He suited his audience."

"And then the man himself?"

"Oh, horrible!" the lady exclaimed with fervour, and then corrected herself: "I mean, of course, impossible from our point of view; but that doesn't prevent his being a good Christian, and all that sort of thing, does it?"

"Well, I still fail to see what possessed you to take the pledge."

"Oh, I felt like it; I was excited. The man's distress touched me. One must do good sometimes."

But the pledge did not trouble her much, for when next he dined at the hall, the vicar noticed that she took her wine as usual. The presence of other guests precluded his reproving her at the time; but, later in the evening he contrived to whisper:

"So you've broken your vow already!"

"What on earth do you mean?" she demanded, staring as at some impertinent.

"You drank some wine at dinner."

"Well. Why shouldn't I? The pledge said only alcoholic liquors."

At that he laughed out loud, when, seeing her look really angry, he checked his mirth and asked humbly :

"What do you understand by alcoholic?"

"Beer and spirits, of course—things that man would drink. I've knocked off liqueurs as well, so I'm not cheating!"

"I always thought the term included wine," murmured the vicar very deferentially.

"Well, you were mistaken."

He let her have it so, and retired in great amusement; which remained his attitude of mind towards the incident till one fine morning he was accosted in the village street by Billiam. To reward and, if it might be, systematise his repentance, Billiam had been given a job in the vicarage garden; but after two days' trial he had thrown it up, simply asserting that it made his back ache. Now for several days he had been loafing about the village, ogling the public-houses with the tail of his eye.

"Beg pardon, reverend!" said Billiam, standing squarely in the parson's way; "but there's a thing I was wishful fer to ask ye. That there leddy as took the pledge 'long o' me; dew she keep ut stric' and faithful? 'Taint hardly fair, a leddy like what she is, there in her great mansion, no one can't tell what games she be at; whereby was I to step into the Chequers here, or fetch a drop in home, they'd all be at me. When I arst for somebody to take the blame thing 'long o' me, my meanin' was for someone same as me, as I could keep my eye on. I done that many a time—an' won it too, though they dew say as I be weak and onendurin'. 'Tis like starin'

straight at each other: first one blinks, then t' other; but ta one what blinks the lastest, he's the man. . . . Now is that leddy playin' fair and square, I arst ye, reverend?"

The vicar had a moment's hesitation, by no means lost on Billiam, ere he answered: "I know she has not tasted beer or any kind of spirits——"

"Ha, ha! You're a-gettin' at me," broke in Billiam with unholy glee. "Gentry beant so great on beer an' sperrits. Wine, that's what I wants to hear about. Will ye swear to me, on the Holy Book, she don't drink wine? Ye 'ont! Ye can't!—She *dew* partake of it! Hooray! Gawd bless ye, parson!" And Billiam made a dart for the Chequers, whose open door invited close at hand. The vicar followed, striving to dissuade, but Billiam only blessed him, chuckling, with face half-hidden in a pewter pot.

"It ain't a scrap o' good, sir," said the publican with sympathy. "I've tried my hand on him meself, and so's a many. He's had religion bad three times to my rememberin', and he kind o' hankers arter it; but, bless ye, sir, it's like water on a duck's back."

Having failed thus ignominiously to arrest the veteran backslider, the vicar went to Billiam's home to warn his wife. The little careworn woman smiled and curtseyed.

"Don't consarn yerself for me, sir," she assured him. "I'm right glad to hear it. The drink's like natchrel to him, an' he's better with it, though there's a many'd cry shame to hear me say so, well I know it. But there! When he've got religion, there's no dewin' with him. Only last Sunday mornun, he

thrashed our little Ted what he's so fond of nearly to dead, he did, for playin' marbles. And if we says a word, me an' the children, we're drivin' him to hell, he'll say, with our wexations. He ha' got 'most a gennleman's nater, have my Billiam; he carnt a-bear no thwartin' once he's set on anything."

The vicar knew not what to say to that. With some commonplace reflection he withdrew; when, feeling the need to atone for his shortcomings as a pastor by some kind of martyrdom, he went to make a clean breast of his delinquency to Mrs Devereux. He expected her to be angry, and she was, extremely.

"Are you mad?" she asked; "or did you really wish to plunge the poor man back into his drunkenness, because you're jealous of that strolling preacher? What possessed you to mention the word wine? Why couldn't you say simply that I had abstained from alcoholic liquors?"

"Because you hadn't. Wine is alcoholic."

"I don't believe it."

"It is, I solemnly assure you!"

"Well, and if it is! What made you go and tell him? It was not your business, was it? I thought you were my friend, and could be trusted. If I did wrong, it was in all innocence. It was mean to me, and downright wicked to the man, to say a word about it. If you'd held your tongue, he would not be drinking now. Don't blame me for his relapse; it's all your doing! What on earth possessed you?"

The vicar hung his head, feeling all she thought him. He murmured, with flushed cheeks:

"He asked me point-blank if you drank wine; and I couldn't say you didn't, when I'd seen you!"

She stared at him with an astonishment which turned to stupid admiration before she observed in friendly tones, with quite new interest:

"You're better than I ever thought you were—so conscientious! Do you know, I always imagined that you High Church clergy considered it right to do evil that good might come of it, and rather despised straightforwardness." She gave a deprecating little laugh.

"You must have been thinking of the Jesuits? Or have you read *The Secret History of the Oxford Movement*? . . . Well, I'm extremely sorry to have earned your anger."

"Oh, that's all over. It was silly of me. And of course I see now it was all my fault."

From that day forward she deferred to him, instead of taking him to task; consulted him in all affairs of conscience, and even upon the conduct of her private business; as if his having told the truth that once to Billiam had made his views conclusive upon every subject. In the ensuing months he so engrossed her favour that the village joked of it; and there was no astonishment in any cottage when, soon after Christmas, the engagement was announced. Then his betrothed departed to the South of France; and he could once more give undivided attention to his cure of souls.

Billiam was again the scandal of the parish. The very episode of his conversion was forgotten. The vicar tried to rouse his manhood more than once;

but Billiam warned him off, remarking kindly : " Yow be all right, parson ; yow dealt straight and fair. Only dontee come smarmin' and frimmicatin' round me or yow'll get what for ! "

It was after Mrs Devereux's return in May that Billiam's wife came up to the vicarage one afternoon in a state of great anxiety. Mrs Devereux was there at tea.

" Have her in here ; you know I'm interested in that man," was her comment when the maid had named the visitor. The vicar still looked dubious ; that tea together, so domestic, before marriage had for him the rapture of an impropriety ; he rather feared that it would scandalise the parish, or at least seem of bad example. " Of course if it's a confession, or anything, I'll retire," she added.

The vicar gave the sign. The woman entered. She began from the doorway :

" Savin' your presence, sir and lady, it's about my Billiam. Here he have been hisself and quiet all these months—a bit free with his fists in times, but mostly tractable. And now they dew say as that there tent be comin' back next month ; and I'm afeerd he'll go agen and git religion. Oh, sir and lady, 'tis a tarr'ble thing ; he 'ont be fit to live with, not for days and days. And that savage he'll fare, I goes in terrors for meself and children. Oh, sir, if you could only 'suade him not to go. He think a deal to you. I tell him why don't he go to church and chuck religion, but he can't somehow bring hisself to face the ceremony. There ain't no ceremony about the tent, ye see ; but he'd take no harm in church, and so I tell him ; whereby in the

tent, that Nokes is there to give it him. Ah, sir and lady, if you only knew the times I've had wi' un—'tis wholly dreadful!" She carried a bonnet-string to her eyes.

"I don't know that I quite approve, do I?" said Mrs Devereux when she was gone. "And I thought her quite irreverent about the church, though I expect you'd call it funny. At any rate, whatever Billiam does, you and I must go to the tent for last year's sake."

At the first opportunity the vicar spoke to Billiam.

"What be yow a-tellin' me?" snarled the scandal of the parish, who, being nearly sober at the moment, was extremely cross. "Bad for me—that there tent? And don't I know it, mister? There's some can't stand a drop o' liquor; I'm like that along o' religion. A drop of that hot an' strong, like Nokes 'll give it yer, a-bawlin' and a-hollerin' like a stuck pig—I can't stand ut; that clean bowl me over. I had enough o' that, I tell yer. I 'ont go nigh the stinkin' ole tent. That can go to hell and all, for me!"

When this answer was reported to the drunkard's wife, that little woman brightened visibly and thanked the vicar. "If only Billiam 'll hold fast by that!" she cried. "But he's that weak, and he hev a kind o' cravin' for religious shoutin'."

The tent returned and was pitched in the same field. The vicar and Mrs Devereux were both present at the opening service. A new evangelist was there in place of Nokes, his voice was pleasanter; and that was all the change. The same old catchwords kept recurring: "Every one of us here

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to-night! A blessing—a blessing on every one of us, here, in this tent, in this field, in this village—here to-night;” and the congregation seemed to gloat on them exactly as before. But when it came to this: “Now I’m going to tell you a simple story. There was a poor man whom God afflicted. First he lost his wife——” the vicar jumped in his seat and gave a startled exclamation. It was the same foolish story, retold in almost the same words which Nokes had used. He could hardly believe his ears. But amazement turned to stupor when the self-same noises followed its conclusion, and Billiam slouched forward, sobbing as before.

“So he’s here after all. What made him come, I wonder?” whispered Mrs Devereux.

“What made him take to drink again?” replied her betrothed viciously. He was feeling very much annoyed.

Billiam was blubbering: “That tuk me right here; that all-ways do. I tried to kip away, but that warn’t no mander o’ use. I tried to stop my ears. Them blessed words ’ll be the death o’ me, carse ’em!”

“Fight not against the blessing, O poor striving soul!” coaxed the evangelist.

“Goin’ to take the pledge again, Billiam?” some light-minded person called out jestingly.

“No; and that’s a fac’!” said Billiam, rounding savagely on the inquirer. “I’m a-goin’ right away, that’s what I’m a-goin’ to do. Flesh and blood can’t stand the way folks set and jeer at me—my wife and all too. I’m a-goin’ right away.”

He kept his word this time. When, six months

later, the vicar's lady called on Mrs Billiam she was told with smiles :

“ I've heerd good news o' Billiam, mum ; he's a-livin' in Norwich. Joe Dutt ran up agen him there, and talked consarnin' me. He's a good-hearted man is Billiam, that I will say. He sent a penny home for little Ted as he's that fond of. And he sent his love to me, he did, and Joe was to say as her what's wi' him now ain't not a patch on me. Joe says he's just the same—drunk while he's got the money, and then o' Sundays he'll hang round the folks as preaches at street-corners and cry like a babe to hear 'em. That's his weakness, he can't help it. I ha' nothin' to say agen the Church, mum, that's quite different ; but this religion is a fearful thing.”

MOUNT MISERY

ON an afternoon late in autumn a man of the genus "loafer" strode lumpishly up the carriage-drive to Stevenham Rectory. He had lived all his life in the parish, but this was the first time he had passed the rectory-gate. As he approached the house his sheepishness increased from a state of mind to a positive disease. He thrust his hands in his pockets and began to whistle; withdrew them suddenly and was silent, pulling a face of superhuman gravity; then fell to humming with lips closed till he caught himself at it, when he set one hand on his hip and, swinging the other jauntily, stopped to look over the smooth lawn strewn with dead leaves at its edges, with eyebrows raised as if in slight contempt. Even at that stage he dared not eye the house-front.

Suddenly, as he was adjusting his crimson neckerchief, he found that he had passed the front door, and was seized with a desire to slink round to the back. But his wife had told him not to be put off with servants. Poised between the dread with which the staring windows filled him, and a habit of obedience to the scold at home, he stood a moment irresolute, in a cold sweat. Then he took the few steps needed

to regain the door, to find himself confronted by a new dilemma.

How should he announce his presence? There was a handle in the wall at his right hand. He guessed it was a bell, but dared not pull it for fear of bringing down the sky. To knock upon the door, the natural method, seemed precluded by the nature of the door itself, which was most of it of glass, through which he saw a stream of floor-cloth between cliffs of flowered wall-paper, a table garnished with queer objects, and in the inner shadow the swinging pendulum of a great clock whose ticking he could hear.

While still debating he saw someone cross the hall, when it occurred to him with horror that he might be visible. Hastily he drew aside and stood up flat against the wall; in which eccentric posture he was discovered by the clergyman, who next minute opened the door and looked out. "Well, my man, and what are you doing here?"

The loafer pulled himself together, tried to meet the parson's stare, could not lift his eyes so high, and finally fixed them on a blackbird which was pecking on the lawn. "Sarvice to ye, sir. Father's been took bad; and my missus said 'twas seemly, so I come. No offence, I hope."

"Offence. Of course not. Will you tell me the name?"

"Jim Haslam—same as mine." The man's face was impassive to the border of defiance, as if a magistrate had put the question from the bench.

"Some relation to Haslam the wheelwright?"

"Nawn that ever I heerd on."

"I'll come at once. Just step inside and rest, while I get my coat on."

"That be a long way," said Jim Haslam meditatively. "I guess I'd best be gettin' home and yow can foller. Yow'd best come drivin', for 'tis rough afoot."

"But you haven't told me where to go."

"Mount Misery—that's where I live."

"Bless us! Where's that?"

"Up o' the walks, in that there belt o' far-trees yow can see fro' the high road agen Dartlesham Red Barn. But yow'll catch me up afore that."

With an awkward lifting of his hooked forefinger to his forelock, Jim Haslam then moved off. Three steps away, he pulled his moleskin cap over his eyes, plunged his hands in his pockets and began to whistle.

The rector, wrapped in a long ulster and a woollen comforter, with hands encased in stout wash-leather gloves, flourished the whip over his pony to such purpose that he overtook Jim Haslam less than half a mile from home. It was just past the hedge which bounds the windmill enclosure—the last hedge for many a mile; the heath-country rolling out from thence like a sea, with occasional isles and promontories of fir-wood, wearing the highway on its bosom like a soiled white tape. The day was all but spent, the heath looked black beneath the greyness—quite black till one glanced at the fir-trees, when it was seen to be brown. The parson made his guide get up beside him, and spread the rug so as to comprise both pairs of knees; then he drove on in silence

broken only by the spank of hoofs upon the road, till, for something to say, he observed :

“I’ve never noticed you at church.”

“At church, did ye say?” The loafer gave a sheepish grin. “What! Ha’n’t yow seed me? Well now, that’s a rum un. God bless my eyes and nose, but that’s what I calls a good un, that is! . . . Well I’ll tell ye straight, reverend, I don’t hold wi’ ut—salvation and all that. Father were born chapel, but he took and chucked it, and I warn’t born neither church nor chapel.”

“You are married, I understand, Mr Haslam.”

“Well, and what o’ that?”

“You say you belong to neither church nor chapel. But surely you were married in church?”

“Hew said any different? Hew’s been a-tellin’ you as me and my missis beant respectable married. And suppose as we ha’n’t a been married in church nor yet in chapel which I don’t say we ha’n’t been, mark you—supposin’, I say, sich the fac’ to be, we might ha’ been married on the register, mightn’t we, mister, and no bones broke?”

“Certainly, certainly. I’m sorry my innocent question gave offence. Now let us talk of your father. Has he been ill long?”

“Not a great sight o’ days. . . . But yow stop arstin’ questions. Arst no questions and yow’ll hear no leasin’. I ’ont tell yer nawthun.”

They had turned from the high road on to the merest cart-track, where the wheels kept jolting in and out of grassy ruts. Before them the belt of fir-trees rose more and more black and imminent. The trees seemed actually to be growing taller. Not

until they were quite close could the rector distinguish the cottage, and then he was led to the discovery, by a film of smoke. It stood in a gap of the belt, so narrow as to be imperceptible at a little distance, unless the observer happened to be right abreast of it, when he saw right through on to a further stretch of heath with more fir-woods afar off upon the skyline. Its roof was of pimperl red, patched here and there with tiles of darker hue, beneath which its face of weathered brick looked glum and swarthy. The two lower windows could scarcely boast of a sound pane, the want of glass being supplied by strips of paper, brown and white, arranged like sticking-plaster. It was about as wild and desolate a dwelling as could be found in the heart of a highly civilised country.

A woman in a clean apron, a much more presentable figure than the rector had pictured as wife to the man at his side, came to the door and dropped a curtsy as the horse pulled up.

"Go yow in, reverend! I'll mind the cart," said Joe in a tone more respectful than he had yet used, cowed by the eye of his mistress and her obeisance to the visitor.

A rickety gate admitted to the patch of garden in which brown weeds beset a growth of winter kail. Here, as on the sheep-walks, the soul of every green thing was seen to go up as an exhalation, leaving a withered corpse for winds to moan over.

Beside the wretched aspect of her cottage and its surroundings the tidiness of the woman in the doorway was remarkable.

She drooped her eyes in abashment, and wiped her

right hand in her apron before submitting it to the parson's clasp, which she did eventually in the manner of a slight offering of whose unworthiness she was conscious.

"I'm sure, sir, 'tis most good of ye to come," she murmured with the whining intonation to which the man of God had grown accustomed; it being the rustic's tribute to his spiritual character, the recognition of a presence, as when watch-dogs bay the moon. "The Lord 'll bless ye, and me and Jim are truly thankful, I'm sure. 'Tis a crool world for pore folks, but there's One above, as I keep on tellin' father when he git the horrors, and the pains the pore ole dear dew suffer be oncommon. . . . Father, here be a kind good gen'l'm'n come all the way from Stevenham rectory-house to see ye, and pray as how ta evil may pass off on ye."

A growl unexpectedly close to him in the dark room made the parson start as if a dog had snapped his heel. Peering, he realised that he stood almost in contact with a low bed on which reposed a human form of some kind. The snarl sank to a grumble as the invalid turned over fretfully. The woman hastened to construe the sound as one of welcome. She fed the scrap of fire, while speaking, with two handfuls of sticks and fir-cones.

"Ah, right glad he be to hear a Christun voice. 'Tis that lonesome hereaway, never a soul come nigh un. We brought un down here from the chamber 'count o' his shriekin' out o' nights. That skeer the children. In times he fare right peaceful, but there's others when ye can't dew nawthun with un. 'Tis best to let un sleep on this here room. And ye see, sir, if that

be the Lord's will to deprive us from him, 'twill be handy for the coffinin'."

From the room overhead came sounds of padding feet with stifled giggles. The rector concluded that the children had been banished thither. It seemed strange that the woman should speak calmly of his death in the sick man's hearing, but not so strange as he would have deemed it in his layman days. A curacy amid the slums of a great town had given him some insight into the lives of the very poor.

"Would you mind leaving us alone together for a little while?" he whispered.

"Oh, sartenly!" She seemed surprised at the request. "I'll just light the lamp and then I'll be off."

She struck a match and lighted a cheap brass safety lamp on the window-sill, moderating the flame carefully by the screw. Then she smoothed the sick man's pillow, whispering something which was answered with a cross grunt. Then she opened a cupboard-door and went in, obliged to mount a couple of steps of the ladder inside ere she had room to turn and shut the door behind her.

The parson took a chair beside the bed. The flame of the lamp on the window-ledge banished the grey twilight, which looked in wolfish, impotent to re-enter. The rays showed a massive oaken flour-hutch in one corner, used as a side-table for the display of a few tawdry ornaments, and covered with a scarlet cloth in holes. The other furniture in the room was of the cheapest, and almost every article was broken somewhere. The dirty surface of the walls was relieved with prints cut out of newspapers

and pasted up. For the moment at a loss how to begin his ministrations, the priest had leisure to take in these details.

"How are you to-day?" he hazarded at length, and, getting no answer in the pause allowed for one, proceeded :

"Now I am going through the form of service especially appointed by the church for the help and comfort of sick persons. It is not very long. You can repeat the prayers after me—silently, if you would rather. Now, are you attending?"

A growl and an uneasy movement came from the bed. The priest, leaning forward, caught these words :

"Go yow along! I don't want nawthun done to me that way."

"Then why did you send for me?"

Again no answer.

The rector waited till the silence grew intolerable, when once more he risked a question.

"Are you feeling worse?"

"I fare moderate, thank ye kindly. How be yow?" was the unexpected rejoinder in a gruff voice.

"Is there anything I can do to help you?"

No reply.

"Is there anything that I can do to help you?"

The parson raised his voice.

The patient retorted in a hoarse and angry whisper :

"There beant no call to go and shout that loud! I don't fare to want nawthun as I know on, savin' to be let die peaceful. Yow can pray if ye like. I'm not a hinderin' on ye."

Hopeless of winning anything more gracious than

the permission thus surlily accorded, the clergyman opened his prayer-book and read aloud the office for the sick without interruption other than a change of position and a groan from the patient. Rising from his knees, he asked once more :

"Are you quite sure there is nothing I can do for you?—nothing I can send you, in the way of food, for instance?"

He had to bend low down to catch the answer.

"I don't want nawthun. Doctor did talk o' prime beef and wine and sich-like rich man's fulery. But that 'ouldn't dew me no good, though she be main set on gettin' o' good things. Yow'd best keep away. I fare long past prayin' for."

"You mustn't talk like that. No one is 'past praying for,' as you call it. I shall come again."

The priest then moved the chair a little noisily, to let the woman know his need of privacy was at an end. He was bending over a plant of musk upon the window-sill, admiring its luxuriance, when the staircase-door creaked open, and she entered, followed by a loutish girl.

"My sister Em'ly, sir, what help me with the children and the housework," she observed in introduction. Then, hearing other footsteps on the ladder, she slammed the door with—

"Bide yow there, ye little mucks! . . . 'Tis the children, sir—six on 'em, and the Lord be praised they keep their health," she explained, turning to the rector, with the orthodox whine.

"Six children, three adults, and a sick old man," the latter summed up mentally, "in a cottage of four rooms at the most. And the children all keep their

health." It was a miracle akin to that of the thriving musk.

He was following his own train of thought, almost oblivious of his company and of the woman's sing-song whine, when she paused and he realised that her last phrase had been a question :

"How did ye get along wi' father?" She did not sink her voice, taking no more count of the sick man who heard than if he had been already in his coffin.

"He does not seem particularly pleased to see me."

She cast a swift vindictive glance towards the bed.

"The Lord ha' marcy on un for a godless old haythen." She raised her hands and eyes towards the dirty ceiling. "'Tis to be hoped he'll sune get better, for he be a trial. The doctor say as there might be a chanst for un if he could anyhow come by strong meat. But bless ye, sir, we don't trouble the butcher—not even Christmas-time, we don't, not always."

"Here is five shillings to go on with. And when next I go to the town I'll tell the butcher to send out some beef."

The woman dropped a series of curtsies, lifting a corner of her apron first to one eye, then to the other. "Gawd's blessin' on ye, sir! May the good Lord reward ye a hunderdfool, as the sayin' is."

She opened the door for him to pass out, admitting a gust of strong cold air. A whiteness along the ground struck the rector with amazement.

"It can't have been snowing!" he exclaimed.

"No, sir. That be only the dag. That gayther and spread unaccountable once the sun's down. Jim

there! Just yow light them gig-lamps, and go yow along o' his reverence, and lead the hoss as far as the tarnpike. Dew yow hear?"

"Right ye are!" came a voice.

The dag, the white ground mist, which had arisen suddenly, making the gap in the fir-belt like a narrow strait between dark cliffs, gave to Jim's movements round the horse and trap the ghostliness which comes of unseen feet.

"If there isn't a ghost up here, there ought to be," remarked the rector, as he walked beside Jim, who held the pony's head. Afar off he could see a gnarled hawthorn, contorted like a man in pain, which loomed up monstrous in its isolation.

"'Tis ill talkin' arter dark," returned Jim evasively. Then after a pause, no question being put, he added: "They dew say a man was bound here."

"Bound! What do you mean?"

"Well, that's a rum un, that is, bein' as it was yow parsons done the bindin'. 'Tis the nater o' dead folks to walk o' nights, and skeer the livin'. In olden time, when neighbours tired o' that, they'd bring seven parsons, book and gowns and all, to read the sperrit bound to some old tree as this—or, if that were in housen, to a pistol or some'at in one partickler room, which they took and bricked up straightway. The old sperrit can't move arter that without the thing they bound un to be shifted. And a good job too, say I."

The uneasiness of the loafer was apparent. It suggested to the priest a freakish thought. It was not so long since he had been a school-boy. Under-graduate pranks were still fresh in his memory.

"James Haslam," he enunciated in a hollow voice, "tell me the truth about your marriage, or I shall feel it my duty to hand you over to the ghost which haunts that tree."

They were drawing very near the twisted hawthorn. The rays from the gig-lamps shone on its knotted stem, and stained the mist about its foot. As the rector finished speaking, something shot forth, as it seemed, from the root of the tree, and sped towards them. Even the rector's blood ran cold; he prayed for pardon, ere the unknown fear resolved itself into a large bird which beat against the left-hand lamp and after a few seconds of troubled flapping blundered off into the waste. Jim Haslam was nowhere to be seen. The parson had to find the high road for himself.

After that the rector drove out to Mount Misery once at least in every week. Though he asked Jim's forgiveness for his practical joke on that first evening, the oaf fought shy of him, and, when they met unavoidably, was dumb and sheepish. With the old man also he could make no progress. Silence, or a curt, gruff sentence, foiled his questions. Often he was told to go away, and, being a man of breeding, might have done so, but for the woman's appeals to him not to "let father die onchristian."

Old Haslam did not thank him for the meat and wine and groceries which he sent regularly to the cottage, though Mrs Jim forever blessed his kindness with uplifted eyes. Only once when he asked point-blank if the sick man had liked the fare provided, did he get a surly: "Very kind on ye, I'm sure."

"Father have been makin' sich a hearty dinner,

thanks to yow, sir," the woman said at opening the door to him. "I'm sure as yow'll observe the differ in him." But the parson, taking his accustomed chair beside the sufferer, discerned no change in the rugged, stern old face, which was seldom offered to his inspection.

It was old Christmas Night, and very cold outside. A high wind moaned among the fir-trees round Mount Misery. In the living-room of the cottage, lamplit and warmed by a coal fire, the scene was convivial as never before.

The rickety table groaned beneath a square meal which would have done credit to the board of a substantial farmer. Dinner had this once been postponed till after nightfall, in order that Emily's young man, who worked at Stevenham smithy all the hours of daylight, might partake of it. It was the first time that this notable had visited at the house of his beloved, whom he had hitherto courted surreptitiously on her way in and out of the village. This invitation to feast with the family, and his acceptance of it, amounted to a formal betrothal.

The youth was gaunt, with scrubby hair and a face that might have been prepossessing in a bony way but for a decided cast in one eye. Most characteristic was a loud, explosive laugh, which he gave forth at intervals of a minute or two, flinging his head back first, as athletes take a run before the jump.

The visitor, Jim and his wife, and Emily sat up to the table. The children crawled or sat upon the floor, getting fed with scraps handed down to them, and simply howling when they wanted more. Conversation between the elders was jocular and more or

less obscene, at the expense of Emily and her admirer, but chiefly of Emily, who oscillated between giggles and little tantrums of mock-modesty. The suitor had his back to the sick patriarch, who kept groaning as he turned upon his bed.

"Wa, be the old un any wuss to-night?" cried Emily, as a moan louder than common made her lover draw up his chair rather hastily. "That make the thard time he ha' hollered out. Charley fare right afeared to set agen the bed. He be that timid, Charley be!"

The young man flung back his head, his throat extending like the joint of a lobster's claw. "Aw, haw, haw! Afeard!—That's a good un, that is!"

"'Tis ta scent o' ta meat dew madden the pore ole dear," said Jim's wife carelessly. "He git to be a sad trial wi' his ollus moanin' and complainin'. But we must bear wi' un, I suppose, seein' as that can't be for long. He'd be wishin' to take ta meat out o' ta mouths o' them as needs it, I shouldn't wonder!"

"Ye lie!" came a hoarse voice from the bed. "I know as I be past wark and the stuff can't a-dew me no mander o' good like what that dew yow together and the children. But I can't help cravin': 'twould be agen nater, and the whole house full o' that there lick-lip smell. . . . Oo!"

He rolled over with another groan, and then lay silent.

Only once again did he speak in the course of the evening, and that was after the work of eating was done and the children had been hustled off to bed.

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The group of elders, seated round the fire, were making jocular bets upon the date of Emily's prospective marriage. Some word focussed the invalid's wits upon their talk.

"He be bound to marry her arter the fust child," he called out sternly. "He can dew that afore if a like, but then he marn dew ut. That ha' allus been ta rewl in our fam'ly. The boys be a law untew theirselves, but ta gels need lookin' arter, bein' softer mostly. That's ta rewl, I tell ye, and I looks to yow, Jim bo', to see as that be stuck tew arter I be dead and gone."

"But Em'ly ain't o' your fam'ly, Mr Haslam, not rightly speakin'," said the suitor with his laugh.

"Not born she beant, but I reckerlect enow o' Scriptor to know what is writ consarnin' the stranger which is within your gates. Ta rewl is laid on har, same as if she was my darter."

"Suppose one was to break that there old rewl, what then?"

"A broken head, or warse," replied the old man tersely. "My son Jim and his brother Harbert what live at Dartlesham 'll malahack that man what break ta rewl."

"We'll pop ye down ta well, Charley bo', and put the lid on. There's not a soul 'd miss ye, so there 'd be no sarch made."

Something of truth in this last statement seemed to strike the suitor, for he sat glum after that, and Emily was obliged to put forth all her blandishments to prevail on him to adhere to his original plan of staying the night.

At last the rector got the better of old Haslam's reserve. One day he happened to remark :

"You have suffered more than most men, I should fancy."

Old Haslam turned towards him instantly.

"Ah, you may say so !" he rejoined with triumph. "Ever since I were tharty I ha' had ta rhewmatick on and off. Likewise, I ha' had t' inflammation, which be wunnerful bad, though not so unaccountable crool as ta rhewmatick, ta which I ha' had it that mortal bad in times as I fared wholly onsensed. I ha' had ta brownchitis times and again, not to tell o' accidents sich as when all my toes was smashed by a tree, and I broke my arm acrost here, and I fell off of a ladder and were took up for dead. And what be ta matter wi' me now I doan't rightly know. In times I fare all over alike, and others, which is warse, I ha' ta horrors. Doctor said that weren't not ta palattic stroke, when I arst un. I dew reckon maybe 'tis my heart-strings worn thin or gone loose or some'at. Yow marn bear in mind as I be gettin' an ancient man, master. Ta be but nat'ral as suffen should be givin' way in my inside. . . . Ah, sufferin'!—I believe ye! . . . Why, governor, if all my affections wherewith I ha' been affected was put in a book, there's a many wouldn't hardly cred what there was writ."

From that day forward the weekly visit acquired a new character of friendliness. Old Haslam still showed gruffness on the topic of food ; and the priest found it harder than ever to give a religious turn to the conversation. One afternoon, the last of February, the old man seemed much worse than usual ; and his

visitor, while apparently giving ear to a rambling tale, was in reality thinking what proceedings he should take when summoned to the deathbed. Confession there must be, if possible, in order to absolution; but beyond that the course of the service was contingent on a point on which he was still uninformed.

"Was your husband's father ever confirmed as a boy—do you know?" he inquired of Mrs Jim as he went out.

Her look was utterly vacant.

"I never heerd tell . . ." she began, still plainly at a loss; then, with face suddenly clear: "No, sir, he never have belonged to no club. That dew seem a pity."

With something in his throat between a sob and a chuckle, which precluded explanations at that time, the rector thanked her.

The parish doctor, looking in one morning to see how old Haslam did, gave the opinion that he would not last throughout the day. There was some debate in the household, whether or no the parson should be summoned. The old man himself, contrary to expectation, expressed a wish to see him once again; which set Mrs Jim against the notion of his coming.

All cavillings, however, were quashed by the consideration, first adduced by Emily, that the parson might contribute something towards the funeral.

Jim was forthwith despatched to Stevenham Rectory, but, chancing to forgather with an ancient crony, he so far forgot the urgency of the errand as to enter the Green Man. Emerging after an hour of

stiff potation into the keen March air, he found things not so steady as he could have wished to see them, and wisely gave up the idea of calling at the rectory in person. Collaring a small boy, on his way to afternoon school, he passed on the message to the child with a potent adjuration to make haste with it.

The youngster lost no time: but he left his word at the back-door and, the servants judging of its importance by the size of the messenger, the rector did not hear it till a full hour later. Ten minutes more were occupied in preparations, and the drive, at the pony's trot, took half an hour. The rector scarcely hoped to find his man alive when he jumped down at Mount Misery and tied the reins to the gate.

The whole family had been assembled in the living-room. The last of the children scrambled out at the staircase door as he entered. The atmosphere was fetid with their breath.

"Yow be just in time, sir," sobbed Mrs Jim with apron to her eyes.

"Then kindly leave us."

"Haslam," he said, when the women had gone out, "the time has come when you must meet your God. Make humble and true confession of your sins now, and I have authority, in Christ's name, to remit them."

The dying man caught hold of his hand, and tried to draw him down.

"Bend closer—closer!" he whispered. "They be listenin' at ta door. Bend close, I say." His puckered lips shaped the words rather than uttered them. "All them goodies yow did send . . . I never

had a mossel on 'em . . . I could ha' laughed to see yow fare so simple. . . . As if old folks was o' use, to go feedin' on 'em up. They ha' devoured all them good things . . . guv me water-gruel. I wouldn't ha' said a word about ta meat and that, if I'd had my share o' wittles other ways. But I ha'n't. For Gawd's sake, don't say nawthun. I tell ye now because that's like a barden on my mind—deceivin' on ye. Yow been kind to me. Swear yow 'ont tell her. . . . Lemme die easy. Swear ut by the livin' Gawd. . . . Yow *shall* swear ut! . . .”

The bony hand of the dying man clutched the rector's arm desperately. The bleared eyes were wild with entreaty. He seemed not to hear the priest's repeated promise.

Then the eyes grew filmy, the strong grasp relaxed, the white head fell back on the pillow from which the excitement of a ruling fear had raised it.

The priest knelt down by the bedside.

In the September following old Haslam's death, the rector called by special request one evening on his model parishioner, Mrs Stollery, a widow with one son. He found her in great distress.

“'Tis about my boy—about pore Charley,” she explained. “He ha' got into bad ways and bad company, fit to break my heart. 'Tis all along o' them Haslams o' Mount Misery. There's a gel called Em'ly as is goin' to have a child, and my Charley ha' been walkin' with her, as I hear. Well, I ha' persuaded Charles to go to Lunnon, where he hev an uncle independent, and glad he be to go, bein' mortal feared o' them Haslams; but he've a-got it

in his head as he marn wed the gel. 'Tis for that I made so bold as send for you. If you would but speak to un, and tell un not to dew ut. 'Tis the custom here, I know that. There's hardly a gel married in this parish as didn't ought to ha' been done months afore. But Charley ha' always been bred superior to sich dewuns. I dew wonder what 'traction he find in a slut as can't keep herself clean. He'd be shamed to have her jine him in Lunnon, though that's what he talk o' dewin'."

The rector sturdily declined the office thrust on him, and spoke for half an hour severely, to the stupefaction and dismay of Mrs Stollery. At taking leave he stated his intention of seeing Charley about publishing the banns.

"The Lord's will be done!" sighed Mrs Stollery in hopeless tears.

Out of doors it was quite dark. A few paces from the cottage-gate a man sprang out of the hedge and confronted the rector, flourishing a stick; only to disappear as quickly, with a curse.

"Jim Haslam!" cried the parson.

There was no reply.

"You are waiting there for Charles Stollery. Remember: I have seen you, and can bear witness."

There came a snarl from the hedge: "The lyin', stinkin' sneak! He marn bide the reckonin', havin' had his game. That's ta rewl in our fam'ly. This here Sunday-school chap, gives hisself ta airs o' Lord Muck-in-a-pushcart, slinkin' off to Lunnon, reckons me and my missis goin' to keep ta blasted kid. Yow 'ont fright me to-night, guv'nor, as ye did by that ole

tree. Sperrits nor parsons 'ont pervent what I'm a-dewin'."

"But you never married your good lady, Jim!"

"And what if I ha'n't." The voice grew sullenly contentious. "Dew as he'd provide for Em'ly same as that, I'd ha' naught agen ut. He'll be a cripple to-morrer, or my name bean't Jim Haslam."

"And I say you won't touch him."

The parson made a dash into the hedge. The struggle lasted some few minutes, ere he drew back worsted, his right arm disabled. A bull's eye lantern flashed upon the combatants, whom their angry blood had deafened to approaching footsteps.

"Why, bless my soul, sir, is that you?" exclaimed the village constable.

"It's all right, Green. I'm having a talk with my friend here. Good-night to you," replied the rector, and kept silence till the policeman was out of earshot.

Jim was first to speak.

"God bless my soul, but yow be the right sort. Yow told a thumpin' lie a-sayin' we was talkin' friendly, when I reckon I ha' broke your arm. Yow marn have a good heart not to holler wi' ta pain?"

The parson laughed.

"Have you done enough damage for one evening, Jim? As for this business of your sister-in-law, I'll do my best to fix it up with the Stollerys. In the meanwhile, I've got some good beer at the rectory. You might do worse than step up there and taste it." There was a rustling. Jim stepped out into the lane.

"I don't mind if I dew," he agreed shamefacedly; and set off like a lamb at the parson's side.

THE FREE-LOVERS

EPISODE IN THE CAREER OF MR BLAND, R.A.

IN the summer of 1896, caught by an advertisement in one of the weekly papers, I hired a furnished cottage in the village of Walberswick, on the Suffolk coast. The place is now being spoilt, I am told, by the construction of a new harbour instead of the old rotting piers and hulks, the tarred sheds roofed with tiles nasturtium-red, the sea-holly, the horned poppies, and the nodding flaxen grasses one so well remembers ; but in those days it had the reputation of a little paradise for artists. And I suppose it still retains its vast expanse of sky and the free play of lights and shadows on the marshes, which were always its chief beauty in my eyes.

Feeling just then a little weary of my halo as a famous painter, it was my self-avowed intention to put it away and become a common mortal for a breathing-space ; but why, with that intention, I should have chosen a well-known haunt of artists for my holiday, I cannot at this distance of time imagine clearly. Probably the disgust professed for my celebrity was insincere, and what I really looked for was adventure of a flattering kind, such as princes seek who travel incognito. At any rate, I meant to live quite simply, even roughly ; for the cottage, from

its description, was a very small one; I took it without inspection, and did not arrange for anyone to wait on me. This leaving all to chance gave a flavour of adventure to the outing, which revived my youth.

I can still recall the sinking of the heart with which, after a walk across the common in the fire of sunset, I first beheld my new abode. For one thing, it was not at all my notion of a country cottage, being new and red, with pretentious windows and two panes of coloured glass inserted in the woodwork of the green front door; for another, it was semi-detached—that is, joined to a companion house, just like it, in the manner of the Siamese twins. On entering I found the rooms most execrably furnished.

Having tipped the fisher-boy who carried my portmanteau, and taken the said portmanteau up into the front bedroom, through the window of which I could see the sails of a windmill pricked against the sunset like a rabbit's ears, I went out to the village shop to purchase necessities. I was returning from that errand when a man accosted me. He was leaning on the garden-gate belonging to the villa residence attached to mine, hatless, with a pipe in his mouth; and he spoke with the tongue of education.

"We're your next-door neighbours. Will you condescend to come in presently and have some supper with us? It won't be much, but there's food in the house, and we shall be delighted. Seeing you turn up all alone, my wife thought it might be a convenience to you this first evening."

I found it hard to make polite acknowledgment,

having, like him, a pipe in my mouth, and with my arms made useless by their charge of parcels; but as best I could I thanked my neighbour for his kindness, and assured him that his invitation was a godsend to me.

"Well, come in as soon as you like. And if there's anything you're short of we can lend, just let us know!"

We entered our respective dwellings. Through the thin wall I heard him talking with his wife—a murmur of conversation in two different keys, the woman's voice being the deeper and the more monotonous. Somehow, from those tones, I pictured her enormous, dark, and with a grievance. I found her little, lean, and very white, with great, green, staring eyes and a coarse mouth—as ugly as a gargoyle and yet not repulsive. Her reddish hair, of which she had abundance, might have redeemed her appearance had she done it properly; as it was, it added touches of grotesqueness, straggling about her face untidily. I remember a tail was loose when I first entered, and it remained hanging down her back till I departed, four hours later. She had never once put a hand up in precaution, as women do so generally. She wore a green close-fitting gown, and I noticed that the lace at the neck was ragged and no little dirty.

Her eyes seemed never to blink. At the moment of my entrance they were fixed on me, as she rose from a chair beyond the table laid for supper, dropping the book she had been reading down upon the fender.

"We know your name already. Ours is Ferris"

observed her husband, who had let me in. "I daresay you've never heard it. I don't exhibit at your place." As a Royal Academician, I stood confounded by his impudence. "But I had a little show of my own at the Goetz galleries last Autumn. Of course I know your work; who doesn't? Can't say I'm an admirer; but then I hate everything conventional and popular."

That was frank enough, in conscience; but his wife spoke still more plainly. Gazing straight into my eyes, she added: "Tom says you're just a picture-maker, not an artist."

I did my best to conceal the annoyance which I really felt.

"Yes, I believe I did say something of the sort," muttered Tom apologetically. "When a fellow can't get ten guineas for a picture, he is apt to decry the work of well-known men who get their thousands. . . . You might bring in that pie now, Elsie."

"I imagine"—I began, resolved in self-defence to be as blunt as they were—"that you are one of those people who choose disagreeable or eclectic subjects, for which they know that there is no demand; and then grumble because no one buys their pictures. That seems to me as unreasonable as to blame people like myself, who choose agreeable subjects, and succeed accordingly. I began, like you, by straining after originality; but years ago I perceived that any startling new effect was either trickery or decadence, that no further advance was probable in legitimate art. So I settled down to do the work the present day demands of artists—

work I do well. I never start on anything that I am not quite able to achieve. . . .”

“I’d hang myself,” broke in my entertainer savagely, as if to hear me talk thus caused him downright anguish. “I’d sooner die than work like that mechanically, without hope of fresh discoveries.”

“And can you really be content to live like that, with no horizon?” asked the woman, still more earnestly.

“Let me touch wood first!”—I felt for the leg of the table, then replied—“Yes, I am quite happy, thank you. But I deny your contention that I lack a horizon. My horizon lies not in the region of technique and execution, but in the choice of subjects from the world around me.”

“I’m glad to see you’re superstitious,” was the woman’s answer; whether of design to change the subject or through forgetfulness I cannot tell. “When we first knew you were coming, we were sick about it, expecting the successful tradesman kind of person Tom imagined. However, when you arrived this evening quite alone, we saw at once that you were not so bad. Now do, please, draw up to the table. Supper’s ready.”

After supper Tom went down to the Anchor and bought some whisky, over which the three of us sat talking till a late hour. Mrs Ferris seemed to take a burning interest in me, as in some strange new creature. She was very amiable, but, though so fragile-looking, quite unwomanly. The house showed not a sign of feminine occupation, and no topics were taboo before her.

More than once her husband harked back to the

subject of my work and prices, proclaiming a friendly purpose to convert me to more strenuous Art.

"I hate your popular stuff," he repeated, "worse than I hate the anæmic efforts of the five Miss Pelotons, who go down every afternoon to the ferry here and wait for sunset. They have their easels set before them all in a row; they screw up their eyes and measure shades of distance nicely on a pencil held at arm's length; they confer together weightily, all in the finest manner. You must see them! And yet they, poor old souls, are quite in earnest; they aren't prostituting solid gifts, like you are. We've got some priceless types down here this summer. Come out with me to-morrow, and I'll show you all our gems."

I went with him next morning, taking sketching things, out on to the common just behind the ruined church. Here and there among the whins, a girl's straw-hat appeared, together with the apex of an easel. The whole place teemed with sketchers. Then, for the first time, I saw Ferris work. The performance took my breath away. Before I had half begun, his daub was finished.

"That's the way," he chuckled, pleased with my amazement. "I call it a graphic note, nothing more. Studio work's another thing. . . . You go at it methodically, I see—the old-fashioned way." He glanced pityingly at my drawing, as yet formless. "Now I'm going down into that hollow for another subject. I'll be back in half an hour."

When he returned, my sketch being still unfinished, he showed me two more efforts quite as startling as

the first. It was the landscape, but gone mad—stark, staring mad! His drawing was magnificent, I must confess. For sureness of touch, for daring simplicity of line, he has no equal. His colouring was always indefensible; and yet, in these slap-dash sketches, miraculously effective. In his landscapes you could always tell which way the wind was blowing, and if he indicated a human figure by two blots of paint, you recognised the type at once and guessed its business.

“Come in and share our dinner,” he said as we returned into the village. “It will please Elsie—she’s quite smitten with you—and give me a little peace. We fight like cat and dog when we’re alone.”

I came to spend as much of my time in Ferris’s house as in my own; and soon recognised the truth of his two statements, namely, that his wife liked me, and that he and she were always quarrelling. There seemed no reason for their disagreement. They were at one in their views on every point discernible, so much so that each, when addressing an outsider, spoke for the other also, saying: “We”—“We love the country.” “We abhor convention.” “We do not believe in God.” It was invariable. Yet hardly a morning passed without my hearing angry voices while I ate my breakfast. Then Tom would flounce out with his sketching things, slamming the door behind him, and if, at his call, I did not go and join him, Elsie would presently come round and talk to me, staring with her great green eyes when any decent woman would have been at housework.

As usual she was perfectly frank. "We say what we mean," was a favourite interjection.

"I like you," she would tell me, "because you are so different. You are respectable, wealthy, a believer—all the things I've heard so often talked of, but never seen quite close, like this, before."

In short my normality was, for her, abnormal. Having spent all her life among soul-tortured originals she found my happy mediocrity refreshing. I had always considered myself something of a Bohemian, but she and Tom would persist in regarding me as the acme and fine flower of things conventional. And this view prevailed throughout the artist colony at Walberswick, Ferris being the idol of the five Miss Pelotons, the two Miss Warners, and other jejune aspirants, old and young. Did I venture to criticise a sketch by one of them, it was to hear: "That is not Mr Ferris's method!" or, "How horridly conventional!" Ferris gave lessons to them all; it was his means of livelihood; and his talent being all his own, inimitable, strange antics were the natural result. I compared his pupils in my mind to honest people, capable of walking quietly for many miles, but bent on copying the capers of a clever gymnast, and so making themselves tired and extremely ridiculous without a step of progress. I, the despised conventional, the master of technique within wise bounds, could, had I been allowed, have taught them something.

These hopeless amateurs presumed to criticise my poor achievements and condemn them. Rounding the corner of a fisherman's shed one sunny morning, I heard these sentences and knew them meant for me:

"I never even glance at his pictures now. They're all the same—just pretty-pretty—studio-work, you know—so insincere!" Two ladies seated on camp-stools before their easels, gave a start as I appeared, and applied themselves diligently to work.

I confess that I felt resentful—I still feel so—of that tone from the mere camp-followers and toadies of high art. But Ferris laughed when I complained to him.

"They get it all from us, I'm afraid," he admitted. "You mustn't mind. They can't paint, of course; and you can, nearly perfectly. But they're not self-satisfied as you are; they possess ideals and do honestly strive after the unattainable. To us strugglers—don't be angry!—there is something peculiarly obnoxious in your smug perfection."

Thus I caught it all round from these quite unknown people, and, angry as I grew at times, it did me good. I had been, I can see it now, in actual danger of becoming the kind of tradesman that poor Ferris thought me. My fame aspersed on all sides, fell away from me, revealing a nether self much younger and more enterprising than I had suspected. Animated by a childish wish to astonish Ferris, I tried some new departures, some of which proved brilliant, and thus discovered latent powers which I have since brought out and used to good advantage.

Mrs Ferris often accompanied me upon my sketching excursions. She would sit near me, on the grass if it was dry, or on a little folding stool which she possessed. Never professing the slightest interest in what I was doing, never even glancing at my canvas, she stared into my face and talked. As little

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reticent with me as with her husband, whose existence she kept commemorating by that extraordinary use of "we" in place of "I"; she drew me to discourse on topics I should blush to mention, possessed with an inexplicable curiosity to learn my views on every subject and predicament from religion to child-bearing; while I felt hardly any embarrassment, her shapeless hat, her tangled hair, her slovenly dress robbing her of all seduction. I regarded her as a sexless thing, a kind of elf; feeling a little touched by the strange creature's preference of me.

"We believe in free love, of course," she told me once. "Only unhappily we've ceased to believe in love at all. It's a thing that comes and goes—a kind of wildfire, isn't it? How absurd to hope to bind it down by law. Now supposing you were in love with a married woman, and she was in love with you, your morals wouldn't stop your taking her, now would they?"

My reply was that I hoped they would, and I tried to make her see the beauty of some self-restraint.

"Oh, that's all preachy-preachy!" she exclaimed impatiently, with a shake so vigorous that it threw her hat awry. "You couldn't love her truly, and still be so cautious."

"I bet you anything you like I could!" I answered boyishly.

"How strange, if true!" she murmured, and then stared at me a long while in portentous silence.

Another time it was: "I get the hump indoors. Our cottage reeks of art as all our world does. Tom would get just as bored as I do, if he didn't paint. I know all about it just as well as he does, only I

haven't the gift of expression to make it tolerable. It's quite a blessing to us to have an intimate who's not an artist."

"Thank you!" I interjected.

"Oh, I know you paint; but you're not an artist in the way we mean. Tom feels it just as much as I do, and it makes him savage. He's hardly fit to speak to when he's fresh from you; you're so comfortable, so contented, so robust. I thought he would have killed himself and me too yesterday when you'd forced him to admit that you have serious talent. The fact is, he is jealous—in more ways than one!"

She uttered the last words significantly, giving me to understand that he was jealous of my charm for her, and yet without a trace of coquetry.

"That's stupid of him," was my comment.

Elsie was younger by several years than I had judged her at first sight—hardly more than three-and-twenty, I imagine. The mere fact of her youth brought an element of flattery into her attachment to a stoutish bachelor of forty-eight. The notion of her husband's jealousy confused me rather.

"He's jealous of me, not you!" she added, as though spectator of my private thoughts. "He sees, of course, the overtures are all on my side. But yesterday he went a bit too far. Of course I answered back. I thought you might hear your own name through the wall, and wonder what was up. The real bother is that we're so terribly alike, we say the same things in the same breath often, and that makes us wild."

That she had met Tom in Paris and had been with him five years was all she ever told me of her

early history. I fancy she had been a model before marriage. The length of time she could sit still in one position and her chosen attitudes suggested the habit of posing; while her ugliness was just the kind of thing that the decadents of the period considered noteworthy. That Tom had grown to dislike her, or she him, I don't for a moment believe; but they jarred on one another, and it was evident that they were not a happy couple. Daily the noise of quarrels through my wall became more thunderous. When quarrelling, they mostly spoke in French, and I heard them exchange in that language epithets which any Frenchman born would think conclusive. Yet, in my presence they were always amiable; Ferris was growing more respectful in his manner towards me—a change ascribable to his admission of my talent as an artist. I never dreamt that they were near an open rupture till one afternoon, returning from a lonely walk, I found Elsie, more untidy than I had ever seen her, standing crying in the road before my house, surrounded by the five Miss Pelotons, all of them striving to console her.

“He went towards Southwold,” the eldest Miss Peloton was observing. “I saw him on the bank; he had his sketchbook with him. You'll find him on the green there, working happily. Don't cry, dear; it's so foolish; people will be wondering!”

But Elsie, seeing me approach, sprang clear of them, and fairly flung herself into my arms.

“Oh, Everard! I'm in such a way! Tom went off this morning in a rage with me. He swore he'd commit suicide; and he's not back yet. He's dead! I know he's done it!”

"Nonsense!" I spoke sharply, to prevent hysterics. "You gave him a bad time at home; and he went out threatening all things; so should I have done! He may come back at any minute and find you like this. And if he doesn't, it will only mean that he's taking a little holiday to pay you out. Suicide! What rubbish!"

"For you it is—it may be—rubbish," she sobbed; "but not for us. It's quite natural for us. I'll kill myself, I swear it!"

"Well, come and look for him first!" I urged her, laughing. "I am pretty sure we shall meet him on the dyke-path, coming home."

"That's just what we've been telling her," said the five Miss Pelotons.

I walked with her to Southwold, and we searched the town and its surroundings, making inquiries, but in vain. Then we walked back towards Walberswick, along the green sea-wall, I saying he was certain to be there before us. My charge was no longer hysterical. She canvassed the possibilities with tragic interest. Even when we found her cottage empty she did not break down, but humbly asked for leave to enter mine. I persuaded her to share the supper which my charwoman had set out for me. Then we sat talking far into the night, attentive to every footfall on the road without. A hundred times, at the sound of steps approaching, she sprang up and went to the door, only to return with a sigh to her chair beside me.

She asked to be allowed to spend the night in my sitting-room, the house next door possessing terrors for her. I offered her my room upstairs, but she

refused, curling herself up upon the horse-hair sofa near the door. It seemed unwise to leave her there alone, so I determined to sit up all night. I watched her, and there came to me the oddest thoughts.

As she lay face downward on the sofa, her coarse hair loose and rippling down her shoulders, I had the illusion that a charming woman lay there, and felt stirred romantically. It was hard to remember what a fright she was by day. The lamp began to waver, and I blew it out. Soon after that I must have dropped to sleep, for when I next knew anything it was broad daylight and her place was empty. The door had been unbolted ; she had slipped away. It made me anxious, knowing her state of mind and her peculiar tenets.

I was preparing to go out and look for her, my door stood open while I hunted for my cap, when the postman found me. He brought only one letter, in a hand unknown. It proved to be from Ferris, and of purport so amazing that at first I could not trust my sober senses. He gave his wife to me.

"She loves you, that is plain to see ; and I presume, from observations, that you care for her. It is our rule to stand aside where love steps in. It will, perhaps, make things simpler for you, a believer in conventionality, if I assure you solemnly that she is not legally my wife. We believe in free love."

Heavens ! What a quandary ! And for me, the most innocent of men, who had done nothing whatever to produce it, nor ever in my life imagined such a nightmare ! I was trying hard to view it reasonably, and succeeding very ill—the suggestion that this young woman, any woman, loved me passionately,

complicating my state of feeling—when Elsie herself looked in.

“I am so thankful. I have heard from Tom. He is alive.”

“So have I heard from Tom. Confound him! He is mad!”

“Then you don’t want me?”

I was embarrassed and made angry by the direct question, for just at that moment I felt half in love with her. This inward contest made me answer rudely:

“Certainly not, in that way.”

It sounded brutal, I was conscious, but she neither flushed nor winced. She smiled.

“I’m rather glad to hear you say so. I should have liked in a way to know your kind of life; and I’m awfully gone on you, Tom’s quite right so far. But we’re so different; we can put up with things from each other that you’d never stand. Though I know all about art and have scavenged up a sort of education, I’m a street-girl *au fond*. You don’t love me, do you? You’re not saying no only because of propriety? . . . Then that’s all right, I’ll go back to Tom. I had no idea of this quixotic scheme of his, you know that, don’t you? He has gone across to Belgium to a place we lived at once, a very cheap place. But you must help me, please; I’ve got no money. He took it all with him. He apologizes in his letter to me for doing so, says it must look pretty mean, but you are rich enough to overlook it.”

“Was there much money?”

“Yes, for a wonder. Nearly ten pounds.”

"Well, why not wire to him to come back? Tell him not to be a fool. I'll do it if you like?"

"No, it wouldn't bring him, and he'd be offended. Tom's so sensitive. He'll think that everybody here knows the whole story and is laughing at him. We must clear out again. We're always flitting shamefully."

"Well, I must take you to him," I conceded grudgingly. "Can you get ready in time for the three o'clock train?"

"Of course I can. My luggage is soon packed."

We travelled together by that train and, after changing at the junction, were alone together in a first-class compartment. She kept feeling the upholstery with both hands, testing its softness, and showed a childish pleasure in such comfort. Regretting my studied rudeness of the morning, I tried to make myself agreeable on that journey; and looking at her as I could not help doing very often, her extraordinary fondness for me still compelling wonder, I wished to goodness she were better dressed. That unspoken wish grew stronger when we left the train at Liverpool Street and I saw folks staring at my wild companion. I took her in a hansom to the Charing Cross Hotel, and engaged two rooms for the night. The rooms assigned to us were near together. Elsie came into mine to talk while I was washing.

"You mustn't come in here!" I called out sharply; and the next minute repented of my words, which seemed as wicked as teaching a child the point of some disgusting innuendo. I apologised, explaining she had startled me.

"Now to-morrow do you know what we're going

to do?" I said, as I wiped my face in a towel. "We're going to do some shopping. I want you to have a dress such as other people wear, new boots and gloves, and a hat of the latest fashion."

"Then you've made up your mind to keep me!" she exclaimed with a delighted look, for which I could have kissed her.

"Not at all," I replied, "though I don't deny I have been tempted. It is just a whim of mine to see you dressed up once before we part for ever."

"You *are* a funny man," she sighed, despairingly. "I could have gone across alone to-night quite well, if you'd just given me the money. Now you're going to no end of trouble and expense on my account, and I shall very likely get in a row with Tom for stopping with you here in London. Yet you don't care for me a bit!"

"My dear, I do care for you, a great deal, and would defer our parting for a few hours."

"Thanks, father!" she retorted, almost saucily. "But that's not what I meant. I don't understand a bit. . . . Well, I owe you something, you've been really kind. I'll do what you wish about the plumage. Only please let me shop by myself. I'll do my best to thrill you just for once."

We breakfasted together next morning, and I gave her money for her purchases.

"It's a big sum," she said as she departed on her errand, "aren't you afraid you'll never see me more?"

Returning, just before lunch, she knocked at my bedroom door and, when I answered, called: "You aren't to see me until tea-time. If you do catch a

glimpse of me, you aren't to look. Tea at four o'clock in the lounge outside the smoke-room."

"All right," I answered, carelessly, for the game had ceased to please me; I blamed my own weakness rather in detaining her so many hours for no purpose, good or bad.

At four o'clock I was already at the place appointed when an elegant little figure crowned with an outrageous picture-hat came towards me with outstretched hands.

"You didn't know me!"

Even then I was not sure. I had to study her features before I could have sworn that it was Elsie. Her attractiveness positively abashed me; it was as if every feature which had made for ugliness had somehow been bewitched into a curious beauty; I could hardly find a word to say to her while we sat at tea, and she told me how the change had been accomplished. Her hair had been made much of by a fashionable coiffeur, who had spent three hours upon it; she recounted the experience with much amusement.

"Well, do you love me now?" she asked, when tea was over. I understood then that she had done this dressing-up as a forlorn hope to take me. The tremendous pathos of our relative positions made my voice shake in replying:

"I almost do."

"Almost is not enough. I thought—— But never mind. I've masqueraded long enough. I'm going to pack up these clothes again and send them back to the shops. You've seen me in them. That was all you wished."

I felt convicted of the utmost meanness. "But they're yours, my present to you, and, my dear, they're paid for."

"Tom wouldn't know me in them, and he'd think I don't know what. They'll return the money if you ask for it. And if they don't—— You've had all the fun you expected out of it, haven't you?"

"But, Elsie!——"

"Don't trouble any more about me, there's a dear! It makes me horribly ashamed. You'll pay my bill for me, and give me the money for my journey, please. We'll pay you back."

I let her go like that, without one kiss, and I cherish a teasing regret for it to this day.

YOUNG DAWLEY

OR

THE FIRST ATTEMPT

WORK in the counting-house of Messrs Garner & Sons, Maltsters and General Merchants in the town of Oldfleet, was over for the day. One after another of the clerks took down his straw hat with its garish ribbon, and it might be his tennis-racket also, from the shelf allotted to such outdoor elegances; and stood in the doorway, waiting for the others. The evening sunshine, flooding the street without, set a smile on the various housefronts and on faces of the passers-by.

"This'll be just the evening for young Dawley to start courting," said a fresh-complexioned, ox-eyed man of thirty. The jest convulsed the men about the door; one of whom turned and, peeping round the door-post at a pale-faced, rather dogged-looking youth, still busy at his desk, exclaimed:

"Did you hear, young Dawley? Sanders says this is just the evening for you to start courting! Shall I take a message to her? The road at the back of the church as soon as it gets nice and dark: will that do? Do you hear what I'm saying to you?"

"Confound his cheek! He doesn't answer when

he's spoken to. This is rebellion. We must look to this, Bull ! ”

The clerk named Sanders vaulted over the counter, and, going behind young Dawley, seized his ears. The clerk named Bull also cleared the counter, and, stooping, looked into young Dawley's face.

“ You've got to learn to answer when we're good enough to speak to you ! ”

Young Dawley let out wildly with his unskilled fists, murmuring : “ Shut up, do you hear ? You just shut up.”

“ Why, bless his little heart, he's in a rage.” One of the tormentors plucked the stool from under him ; but that had been expected, he did not sit down ; while the other seized on both his hands and, weighing on them strongly, forced the victim to his knees. Young Dawley's face was scarlet ; his eyes bulged.

“ He's on fire, just look at him. Bring water, someone, quick, or the whole place'll catch alight.”

Outside the office-door stood a small trough of water, placed there for the refreshment of passing dogs. This was brought in hurriedly by one of the clerks, and its contents flung in Dawley's face, which Sanders fell at once to wiping with a dirty duster.

“ Shut up ! Oh, I say, you fellows, do shut up ! ” the weakling still protested, but his cries were stifled.

“ We're only teaching you, young Dawley. You must learn to behave, and answer nicely when you're spoken to, or there'll be trouble ! You're our worm, and we're fond of you ; only don't you think of turning, mind——”

“ What's all this noise about, gentlemen ? Gentlemen ! You're no better than a pack o' roughs. Get

out!" exclaimed a voice of authority. Mr Pearce, the manager, had just emerged from his private room.

"I made sure he'd gone," muttered Sanders, adding aloud: "We're only fooling, sir!"

They decamped at once, however, in some dismay, leaving their butt alone in the office with the manager. Young Dawley rose up slowly from the floor, dusted his trousers, put his tie straight, smoothed his hair, dried his face and neck with a pocket-handkerchief—in short, did all that could be done to mask the fact that he was crying.

"I thought all that bullyragging nonsense was done with. What made them start afresh?" asked Mr Pearce in tones of great annoyance.

"I was feeling out of sorts. I lost my temper, sir."

"Lost your temper! I should have thought you'd learnt by now! How often have I told you to stop moping and take things pleasantly—laugh at 'em, see the fun, that's all it is. It's a wonder you don't get ill, the life you lead—always mugging indoors, reading, out of office hours. Take up some manly game, that's my advice to you. Join the cricket or the tennis club and be like other fellows. You'll soon see things brighter."

Young Dawley found such well-meant counsels more disheartening even than the horseplay of his fellow-clerks. How could he laugh at his tormentors? His sense of humour was acute and cultivated; while theirs was of the booby-trick description. They never called on him to laugh but at his own expense. And as for athletic games, he played them badly, so got

further ridiculed. Who could expect a boy, brought up alone at home by maiden aunts, to be the same as men like Bull and Sanders? That was what no one in Oldfleet seemed to have wit to perceive; least of all men Mr Pearce, the manager, his would-be friend.

"It's no use, sir, I'm hopeless," he answered desperately.

"Hopeless! Don't tell me! You just give my advice a trial. Now get along with you. It's a sin to waste a minute of this lovely evening."

Young Dawley went with alacrity, and before he had made many steps in the sunlit street, threw off dejection and walked with elastic step. For once, since his coming to Oldfleet, he felt pleasurable excitement. Unknown to anybody, he had scraped acquaintance with a pretty girl, and was going to take her for a walk this evening. This was the reason of his anger in the counting-house just now over a joke which he had endured with equanimity for four long years. The road behind the church had been mentioned, raising in his mind the fear lest his tormentors had really got some wind of the appointment. Now, perceiving the suspicion to be senseless, he made haste.

His lodging was a white-faced cottage, one of several, overlooking an open space among the outskirts of the town, which was called Trinity Square but looked more like a village green. Geraniums, pelargoniums, and one tall spiræa were crowded in the window of his sitting-room, which was also the holy of holies of his landlady, Mrs Digweed, who worshipped her flowers and her furniture. This good woman spent her mornings in dusting and arranging,

her afternoons in passing in review the morning's work. Till twelve o'clock she wore upon her head a man's old cap; from noon till bedtime a kind of knitted mat of black and scarlet, which might have been taken from beneath some china shepherdess. Her hair was gathered in a net, too unobtrusive to be called a chignon. She never went out beyond her own backyard, or spoke to anyone except her next-door neighbour and the calling tradesmen. Her present lodger she adored as fervently as she had hated all his predecessors. He was so quiet and studious, so little detrimental to her fetish furniture. She had grown, as she said, to "love him like her own," and, aware of his persecution, so exaggerated it that she thanked God every time that he came home unmurdered.

"I've got to do a bit of a change," said Dawley, as she came out of her kitchen, hearing the front door open. "Those fellows at the office have been at me again; and I'm in a mess."

"Well, of all the wickedness!" cried Mrs Digweed. "That collar as was clean on only this mornin' wholly sloshed and spoilt. I wouldn't stand no more of it in your place. I'd have the lor of 'em. And just this evenin', when you're goin' out to Mr Garner's; it is vexation!"

The invitation to sup at Mr Garner's was young Dawley's fiction, to account for his going out at all that evening. He preferred to miss his supper altogether than have Mrs Digweed suspect him of an amorous intrigue. The good lady was still fermenting when he came downstairs again some half-hour later.

"Now do you mind and be careful, Mr Dawley, do, for goodness' sake! And come home early! There's such wicked ones about; and the police all good for nothing, or they'd stop such doin's. If I were you I'd make bold and tell Mr Garner hisself the life they lead you."

Bidding her reassure herself, young Dawley fled, aware that he betrayed a guilty redness.

Crossing the churchyard, where the headstones stood out black against the sunset, he descended a short flight of steps to a white gate abutting on a roadway terraced in the slope of the hill. A double row of elms borders this walk upon the farther side; between the trunks, as through a colonnade, you see the river and a stretch of marshland ending in distant trees upon a rising ground. Already night was stealing on the meads; only the river gleamed forth ruddily, and pleasure boats, dark objects, could be seen troubling its surface with the dip of sculls. From dwellings hidden underneath the hill came shouts of children playing.

Young Dawley's heart sank. Kitty was not there. He looked at his watch, and got immediate consolation. It wanted twenty minutes of the appointed time. Luxuriously he set to work to recall every detail of their former meeting.

Some merry-go-rounds and swing-boats had encamped, as often happened, upon the patch of green before his lodging. At night the mechanical music, the steam whistles, had disturbed his reading. He had gone out in despair, at length, to watch the fun. All at once among the humble crowd he had found himself beside two maidens, prettily dressed, who

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stood fascinated beside a shrieking whirlpool of steam-horses. The one nearest to him had flaxen hair, confined only by a ribbon at the neck.

"Come on!" urged the one.

"I don't like to," murmured the other. "It'd be different if we had a fellow with us. But alone!"

Glancing round suddenly, she had noticed Dawley, and had shrunk away. Her beauty proved quite blinding. How he managed it he could not think; his cheeks burned now to think of his effrontery; but in a minute he had raised his hat and spoken, in another they were all three up on the steam-horses, in yet another he had learnt his charmer's name, and had obtained an appointment for this evening. She was the daughter of a farmer out at Esham and had lately come to serve in Turner's shop.

Again he consulted his watch. It was the time. His heart began to beat convulsively. All seemed now incredible. He resolved not to look for her, to pretend to himself that he did not expect her yet awhile, and in pursuance of this stratagem was watching the rise of mist upon the meadows when a voice said:

"Well? Good-evening!"

There she stood. The shaking hands, each asking how the other did, appeared absurd in face of his emotion. Both laughed a little nervously, as feeling this.

"Well, where shall we go?" asked Dawley with another laugh, mere tribute to his tongue's futility.

"Oh, where you please. It's all the same to me. I don't know any of the walks round here," she answered with the like embarrassment.

He led her round about by garden walls, seeking the open fields beyond the town. A halo grew upon the pointed roofs; the moon was rising. Feeling the awkwardness of walking side by side, detached, with separate paces, he offered her his arm, which she accepted naturally. Then, when he had recovered from the tremors which her touch awakened, and they were following a lonely path through half-reaped cornfields, he took her hand and fondled it, at first scarce noticeably. The shocks of corn, in rows, each with its shadow growing stronger as the moonlight quickened, diffused a sense of silent and discreet companionship. At first they spoke of things indifferent, owing to some constraint on Dawley's side; but her evident friendliness, the willingness of her hand to be caressed, at length dissolved his shyness, and he talked. The pent-up griefs of years were then divulged. He told her things which he had never thought to tell a fellow-creature—little details of his persecution which had rankled long. And Kitty said "Poor boy!" and "What a shame!" or pressed his hand a little when he paused.

"I've had a beastly time, a nightmare; but it doesn't matter now you've come. It seems as if I had been waiting for you all the time. I'm a fool at the things they're good at—games and sport. But that's not all of life, nor even half. They'll see the difference in a few years' time. I shall be someone famous, heard of—I feel I can do almost anything now you're here—and they'll be where they are."

"I don't believe a half you say," said Kitty soothingly. "You didn't strike me as at all that sort of

fellow—not a duffer, I mean, and so different to others! I don't know what's the time," she added anxiously. "Do just look at your watch, I must be in by nine. Do let's be turning, please."

They returned towards Oldfleet with a quicker step, he still cherishing her hand beneath his arm. That hand seemed nervous and, he thought, impatient. It told him she was really in a hurry. Among the outskirts of the town he stopped to say good-bye.

"But why?" she gasped. "This isn't where I live."

"Forgive me, dearest; it's for both our sakes. If those brutes I was telling you about saw us together they'd make no end of fun. I'll see you safe to the door, but not together. You don't know this place."

"You are a caution," Kitty laughed, good-temperedly. "Well, good-night."

"Oh! I say, won't you give me one kiss?"

She presented a cool cheek to his devotions.

"Don't you follow. I can take care of myself. And it makes me creep to think of being shadowed."

As her corporeal presence passed from sight, the mental vision of her came to Dawley with a warmth and radiance which surpassed reality. His eyes filled with happy tears, his lips murmured childish endearments, he walked like a drunkard in a world transfigured; he strode back again among the fields and there wandered, rehearsing love-talk to the shocks and vows to heaven, till the church clock striking ten recalled him with its solemn chime.

"You're late!" exclaimed Mrs Digweed reproachfully. "I've been in fears this half-hour that some harm had come to you." She came from the kitchen

with his bedroom candle lighted. "Well, how was they all at Mr Garner's? I'll be bound as the young ladies cast an eye, so smart you've made yourself."

"Oh, it went off all right, I think," said Dawley sheepishly. He added, "I'm quite sleepy, I must get to bed."

"Oh, you're lookin' flushed, and your eyes that unnatchrel bright! You've got excited—that's what it is—and you so delicate. As I was sayin' to my neighbour only yesterday, you ha'n't been the same, not since the night them whirlygigs and titmatorters made all that hurly-burl in front o' here. You missed your night's rest then, it's my belief, and you ha'n't never got over it rightly."

"Young Dawley, you must really take some regular exercise," remarked Sanders next morning judicially. "I can't see a fellow-creature fade away before my eyes for want of a bit of good advice. You mug away at books in those stuffy diggings every night, and, of course, look blear-eyed and sickly of a morning."

This description scared young Dawley rather; in going home he studied his appearance in shop windows; but Sanders and the others spoke good-naturedly; they even deigned to laugh at a retort of his, and say, "Young Dawley, we shall have to mind you presently." On the whole it was a very easy day.

That evening in his lodging he devoured Part I. of *Maud*, and wished to lie awake afterwards and find again his raptures of the night before; but the efforts to evoke his Kitty brought on slumber, and he slept till Mrs Digweed came and called him.

In going to and coming from the office he trode self-consciously when passing Turner's shop, which had acquired the physiognomy, imposing and a shade forbidding, of a prospective father-in-law. Alone among the houses lining the old street, it seemed alert and knowing. From the moment when, emerging from Duck Yard, he met its stare, till that when, at the corner by the bank, he could escape it, young Dawley was on his best behaviour, and felt solicitous for the right adjustment of his cap and tie.

On Sunday he went to church both morning and evening in hopes to see his charmer; but she was not there. In the vaulted porch, as the crowd poured out from evensong, he saw a girl from Turner's, and made bold to ask for Kitty.

"Oh, she isn't here. She goes home to her people of a Sunday."

Young Dawley walked home through a town made lonely.

Then a shocking thing occurred—a thing, at any rate, which shocked him painfully. On Monday he heard Sanders say to Bull:

"There's a crumby girl at Turner's shop—a new-comer; spotted her? Pug nose, saucy eyes, and rippin' hair. Larky, too, you bet! Just game for anything. I marked her on the station yesterday—tipped her the look all right, and she responded. A regular little devil! I must buy a new tie or something this dinner-time, and get a word with her."

The page of the ledger upon which young Dawley worked became illegible. His love was outraged,

quite apart from jealousy. He thought of satyrs stealing up against a sleeping dryad, of dragons, open-mouthed, approaching a chained virgin—all the images of vice assailing purity which he had derived from his lonely readings. He must do something in his love's defence. If Sanders could go in and buy a tie, well, so could Dawley. Why had he never thought of it before?

When dinner-time arrived he slipped out early, and with blind courage, entered Turner's shop. Kitty was not there. He mumbled a request for half a dozen collars.

"What size, sir?" inquired the saleswoman. But just then Kitty came behind the counter to ask some question of the girl confronting Dawley. He lifted his cap and, blushing furiously, asked how she was. She smiled and gave her hand to him across the counter.

"Are you game for another walk on Wednesday?"

"Oh, yes, if nothing happens to prevent it."

"Thanks awfully." Regarding his business as transacted, Dawley was making for the door, when a voice recalled him, saying:

"And the collars?"

The saleswoman was staring at him impudently, her elbows on the counter. Kitty was laughing in her handkerchief.

"Oh, send half a dozen round to Mrs Digweed's. Fifteen and a half's the size. I can't stop now."

As he fled forth, clothed in shame from head to foot, Sanders was just entering the shop. At least he had forestalled that foul-lived beast. Kitty was now engaged for Wednesday evening. He would

seize that chance to offer her his life's devotion, and make her promise to be his alone.

Sanders, owing to a reprimand from Mr Pearce, was more than usually diligent, and therefore silent, in the days which followed. There being no further talk of Kitty at the office, young Dawley felt secure.

No sooner was work done on Wednesday evening than he hurried back to Mrs Digweed's, where he washed himself from head to foot with scented soap and dressed more carefully than ever in his life before. It took some time. With horror, as he crossed the churchyard, he saw that he was two minutes late. He stood beneath the elms, and looked; no sign of Kitty. He walked up and down, still hoping, till the clock struck eight; then hope forsook him, and he felt half-dead; till he remembered she had said "if nothing happens to prevent it." Her father or her mother might have died—nay, must have—or his love had been delusion; or else old Turner might have kept her in for something.

"I'm glad you're back so soon," said Mrs Digweed, when he had dragged his grief-broken limbs back to his lodging; "but I wonder as they let you come away so early. Why, they couldn't ha' finished dinner when you started."

He stared at her as at a lunatic for some seconds, before he remembered his invention of a second supper-party at his employer's.

"Got a sick headache—had to ask to be excused," he muttered.

"You're not yourself, sir. If I had my way I'd put you to bed, I would, and send for Doctor Cox," said Mrs Digweed.

Young Dawley spent a wretched night. When called in the morning, he felt still so weary that, despite himself, he turned and slept again; with the result that he had to dress in a furious hurry and go without his breakfast. Even thus, he was late at the office, and got a reprimand from Mr Pearce.

"You're coming on, young Dawley—all round, you are!" said Sanders when the manager was shut in his private room. The words provoked a burst of laughter quite inexplicable, till Sanders added:

"Fie, you naughty boy! Oh, fie, for shame! Who went for a walk one Wednesday night with Kitty—a girl in Turner's shop? My word, how elegant! Our namby-pamby, delicate fine gentleman! What would his aunties say? Who held her hand, and blubbed, and told her all his troubles? Who thinks himself a blooming genius — so superior to us poor common chaps? She wasn't a bit pleased—can you believe it?—though so highly honoured. She wanted hugging, and he only stroked her hand. She prefers us common ones, who just make love to her."

"Shut up, Sanders!" said one of the clerks, whom Dawley had not till then suspected of any delicacy. "It's caddish to trade on things you learnt in that way."

"I'm only speaking for young Dawley's education. We shall have to take him in hand, that's clear. He's no more notion than this stool has how to handle girls."

Young Dawley felt exactly as a guiltless man would feel at hearing his death-sentence read in

sneering tones. He did not weep, as he had done for less occasion, but stared despairingly through aching eyes at a world which refused to be darkened, whose continued brightness mocked his desolation. What seemed to Sanders a mere amorous adventure, of the sort men count by dozens every year, to him was life itself. He wished to die, and, as the day wore on, this wish became a valiant resolution, enabling him to bear with fortitude the hailstorm of cheap jests.

What good was he in the world? At the grammar school he had attended as a day-boy, he had been a standing joke the same as here at Garner's—a freak of nature which the gentle pitied and the sturdy longed to put out of its misery. The general scheme of things was dead against him. Even the Christian Church, as he beheld it, was his enemy, preaching athleticism as its leading dogma. The rector, when he spoke to Dawley in the street, always adjured him to take up some game or other. As for the laity—the men desired rough games, the girls rough lovers; both derided delicacy. His aunts, he knew, had stinted themselves for years to make provision for a wretched being who had better never have been born. He resolved to end his life that very evening, while his purpose glowed, before reflection came like a grey warder and compelled him to pursue the convict round.

His idea was to throw himself into the river, well below the town. Desiring simply to disappear, he wrote no letter, but after supper took his cap from its peg in the passage, telling Mrs Digweed he was going for a walk.

"You'd best take your mackintosh. That's a-goin' to rain," she screamed after him.

By a road of mean dwellings, all with lighted windows, he reached a gate admitting to the open marshland. Never had he known so dark a night. It took him long to find the high grass bank he wished to follow. Striking it at last, he set off briskly, feeling much excited. Determined not to contemplate the plunge in prospect, which must be done unthinkingly, he felt, or not at all, he gave up his mind to memories, which were not all painful. He had a vision of the little sitting-room he had just left, lighted up and with a fire in the grate, as he had known it so often upon winter's evenings. It looked very cosy, with a crimson cloth upon the table and the white glass lamp. Now in a minute it would all be over. His life was useless ; it was just as well.

All at once he made a false step in the darkness, stumbled, and pitched headlong into shallow water. He struggled and regained his feet, spitting out filthy mud. His face was slimed all over. He stood in clammy mud above his ankles.

Neat to a fault, as the result of his aunts' upbringing, and careful of his health, young Dawley forgot everything in dismay at his predicament. Never had he been in such a mess. His clothes were spoilt, and he might catch his death. Seizing hold of the grass of the bank, he pulled himself out. His cap was lost. Shivering, he hastened back along the dyke. Rain was falling, to increase his wretchedness. Lights of the town shone out ahead to guide him. He blessed the rain, which was coming down in torrents by the time he reached the houses, since it had driven every-

one indoors. Then he remembered his intention to be dead by now, and felt more than ever vexed by this mishap. He even wept a little. Everything went against him. As soon as he had changed his things he would come out again and make an end.

But he was reckoning without Mrs Digweed, who appeared the moment that he opened the cottage door, and surveyed him, speechless, in a trance of horror.

"Why, what have happened to you, you're all slime from head to foot, and where's your cap?" she faltered, trembling, hand on heart.

"I fell into a ditch, it was so dark. I must change everything."

"Fell? Don't tell me! You ain't the sort to do it. 'Tis foul play, that's the matter; but there's One Above. Get along to your room!" she cried with sudden fury. "Get you straight to bed—atween the blankets. I'll be up directly. Here, take your candle."

Young Dawley did as he was told dejectedly; to-morrow seemed so long to wait for death. He was lying with face down upon the pillow, whimpering at his own ineffectuality, when Mrs Digweed came. In her hands she held a tray, and on the tray reposed a lofty bottle, a tumbler, a sugar-basin, and a stoneware jug exhaling clouds of steam.

"There!" she exclaimed, setting her burden down upon the commode. "The Lord forbid as I should give my neighbour to drink; but that's wonderful good against a chill. I keeps a drop in my kitchen cupboard, case o' accidents. Now here's a good strong dose; and you can mix yourself another if you feel

the want of it. That 'ont hurt ye, after such a wettin'. Now I'll take and hang them things afore the fire."

Young Dawley sipped and shuddered, sipped again, and then was conscious of delightful warmth suffusing him. His whole outlook brightened rapidly. A chuckle took the place of the sob in his throat. It was as if a powerful and friendly hand had suddenly been laid upon his shoulder, and looking round, he had beheld a laughing face. He discerned the humour of his late proceedings. On his way to drown himself in the river he had fallen into a ditch, and had fled home, terrified as at a great calamity. He saw something ludicrous even in his love for Kitty, the way he had idealised a common shopgirl. Impatience of his lot in life, he now felt none; he floated high above it on a plane where all is laughter.

When Mrs Digweed came to see him, he was fast asleep.

THE LEGEND OF PARADISE LODGE

FIFTY years ago in every good-sized village of East Anglia there was a brewery, a ropewalk, a foundry, a rickcloth manufactory, and two or three windmills ; of which the ruins may be seen to-day. Each of those defunct industries supported its master in comparative opulence, and employed its one or two skilled workmen at wages higher than could be earned on the land ; and their decay has much contributed towards the depopulation of rural districts where now a youth must till the soil or emigrate. In most villages you will still find some old man, hardly distinguishable in speech and manners from his working neighbours, enjoying respect as a sometime employer of labour.

In the village of Straldwick, ten years ago, there was living an example of this dying class, a Mr Barham. He had been a brewer and maltster in a small way, and still resided in a little house behind the brewery, now let for a trifle yearly to the carpenter, who stored his planks there. By his own showing, it was the malt tax that had ruined Mr Barham. It had caused him, anyhow, to close the doors ; but he had saved some money, which rumour

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magnified to a colossal sum. The villagers, seeing him live poorly, called him a miser; but the term applied more truly to his wife.

The daughter of a millwright—yet another of the dodo breed—accustomed to view trade as one with livelihood, Mrs Barham had regarded the closing of the brewery, the cessation of its yearly revenue, as actual ruin. By nature of a saving turn of mind, from that day forth she set to work to scrape and pinch, for the benefit of her son Ephraim, whom she wished to see a “tradesman” like his father before him. She went through life with set teeth, as if engaged in a perpetual tug of war; and in truth she had continually to wrestle with her old husband’s easy-going nature, strong only with the strength of a heavy inclination towards good cheer. It was like propping up a boulder on a smooth slope; did she relax for an instant, he had rolled downward—had given twopence to a beggar, or joined the gossips at the Hand-in-Hand.

Mr Barham was, in fact, the very opposite of his good wife. Rubicund and hale in spite of meagre fare, he was always smiling when alone, and agreed to every proposition with a child’s facility. To mark his fallen state, he wore a frock coat, green with age, on week-days, and a prehistoric beaver hat on all occasions. For staff he had a sapling with a goodly knob, which the movements of his wrinkled hands had polished richly. His pleasure was to potter near the village inn; taking a step, then resting on his stick, prodding the hedge-side grass as if in search of treasure, or leaning on a cottage-gate to view the garden; till someone came along of rank

sufficient to offer him a drink, which he accepted. He strove to conceal this habit of backsliding from his wife, but ineffectually. Her scoldings made him slyer and more fearful, though in fact they meant no more than met the ear. She scolded simply as a parrot screams, bearing no malice for his stolen pleasures. Regarding men as all alike nefarious, she blamed herself rather than him for such delinquencies. They all proceeded from defective oversight. A cat will steal milk if it gets the chance.

"And aren't you ashamed of yourself, John Barham?" she would shriek at him. "Goin' gossip-pin' and drinkin' while I moil and slave! What do you find to talk about? Now you tell me! A lot o' filthy jokin', I'll be bound!"

Mr Barham always said that he talked business. For thirty years and more, he had been looking for a snug investment for the two thousand and odd pounds which lay upon deposit at his bank at Ipswich. By his own account, he talked of nothing else during all those visits to the Hand-in-Hand. It was besides a topic which his wife detested, esteeming investment the sure way to lose; and the occasions when she spoke her mind against it were the only ones when Mr Barham smiled superior. Her horror and his trifling with the notion might have gone on till now but for a chance meeting with one Dutt, a builder, and the offer of a drink one winter's day.

The builder, just alighted from his gig, led the way into the parlour of the Hand-in-Hand, empty at the moment save for a cheerful fire, whose flame diffused a sense of welcome and of company. Mr Barham,

taking seat upon the settle, held out his hands to it, and smiled into its glowing heart. Mr Dutt sat down opposite and did likewise, having given his order to the landlord.

"Well, how's business?" asked Mr Barham, with a chuckle which proclaimed the compliment unblemished by the least desire to know.

When Dutt made answer, "Shockin'!" he chuckled again and shook his head, observing: "Ah, bad times! bad times!"

"I can't think what ails the folk," pursued Dutt with a despairing shrug. "'Taint lack o' money; there's more o' that about than you'd suppose. But they put it into stocks and shares away from home instead o' property. Right mad, I call it. Never was there sich a time for decent housen in the country—what I call gentlemen's crazes—fancy cottages with a turret like, or a dovecote, and a bit o' stablin'. There's the demand, and there ain't the housen, yet the folks 'ont build. Now if I had a friend with money I'd say: build that kind o' place. Build, that's what I should say to him, and not for my own sake, mind you; he could go to whom he liked. But I see a deal in that line, and I know as he'd never repent it."

Mr Dutt here lifted his glass.

"Ah, you may say so!" chuckled Mr Barham, smiling vaguely at the fire.

"Now, there's yourself!"

"Oh, me!" laughed Mr Barham.

"You got money, and, what's more, you got a bit o' land too, ha'n't ye?"

"Oh, that!" Mr Barham exposed toothless gums.

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"That's a joke, that is. You know Paradise—well, 'tis out there, three acres. My poor old father bought that for a wager. That's good for nawthun' savin' rag and thistle."

"I tell you, sir, it's good for one thing, and that's buildin'—gravel soil, high sitiuation, wide views—why, man, it's just the site they're all a-cravin'."

"You don't say so!" Mr Barham seemed dismayed. "But that don't consarn me one way or t'other, bein' as I should never live to reap the profit. A house need four or five year arter that be built to season and get fit for folks to live in. My Ephraim can build there if he like."

"Why, bless my soul and body!" cried Dutt the builder, slapping his own knee, "you are an ancient one, and no mistake! I remember hearin' my old father say the same; and I don't deny but there's some sense in it. But, bless you! four or five year to season! There's no one nowadays ha'n't got the time. Was you to think o' buildin' up at Paradise, I'd undertake to have the whole place ready by July. You wouldn't have to wait, not for your profit."

Mr Barham, by this time seriously alarmed, bethought him of his wife, as of a power behind him.

"Come you round to mine, and tell that to my missus," he suggested slily.

To his surprise the builder rose at once, professing willingness.

It was but a few steps up the road to gain the disused brewery. Two shattered wooden gates, with traces of gigantic lettering, admitted through an archway to the grass-grown yard, upon whose further

side there stood a square-built cottage, white-washed and roofed with slate, entrenched behind a ragged hedge of privet.

"Wait you here a minute!" said Mr Barham, as they passed the little gate which left just room for one to stand before the door. He then hobbled round to the back, announced the visitor and, without waiting for his wife's anger to distil in words, passed through the house and undid the front door.

"Come along, mother!" he called out from the parlour.

Mrs Barham glared at the kitchen dresser, stamped her foot, clenched her hands and gnashed her teeth, till, wondering what the visitor would think of her delay in coming, she fell to tidying herself feverishly. Mr Dutt was of the class she deemed genteel—the class to which both she and Barham did of right belong, but whose manners she half feared she had forgotten.

With tremendous stiffness of deportment she at length entered the parlour, shaking hands with Mr Dutt and making the polite enquiries like some grim old priestess at a sacred rite. His easiness, his jocularly relieved her while apprising of a sad decay in manners since old days. The matter of his business was then laid before her, and she was impressed, house-property being, in her eyes, a genteel possession. She said:

"I never heard of such a mad scheme, Mr Dutt. For shame to make sport of a silly old man, fillin' his head wi' such rubbish."

Mr Barham rubbed his hands delightedly. Dutt had met his match.

"Madam, you wrong me greatly," said the builder in a tone of slight offence, stiling his speech to suit the style of Mrs Barham. "I spoke to your good husband as I would to my own father. There's no doubt but you could let it for, say, fifty pound a year. That's good interest on a thousand, and that won't cost you seven hundred. Was you to start buildin' this spring, the place 'd be ready for occupation come July."

"And how if we don't get a tenant?" asked Mrs Barham sagely, with a touch of scorn.

"No fear of that, madam. It's just the place the town-bred gentry fancy for a change. You've only got to put your house on Rackham's list. . . . But here's a notion for you. Take and furnish the house yourselves, nice and comfortable—put it at a couple o' hundred—then you let it as a furnished house for summer residence and get your five or six guineas a week. You charge by guineas when the house is furnished, and the shillings count up unbeknown. The sea ain't four miles off that plot o' yours as the crow flies. You can put that, an attraction, in the advertisement."

"Well, Mr Dutt," said Mrs Barham with finality, "I won't gainsay but what there may be sense in what you've told me. Could you plan out the sort o' house, and make an estimate; and then we could go into the thing more business-like."

"With pleasure, madam. I'll look in o' Saturday."

Mr Dutt rose up at once and buttoned his overcoat. Mr Barham was for trotting out with him, but his wife detained him, saying:

"Stop you here, John Barham!"

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He stood before her, sheep-faced, with his senseless smile.

"My dear," he sniggered, "don't you go too fast in this here business. You leave that to me. It needs a deal o' thought."

"A deal o' drinkin' at the pub., you mean, you crafty old muck. You've done a mornin's work for once in your life."

Thenceforth the old man was out of it. Mr Dutt made no further pretence at consulting him when he called on Saturday with the plans and estimate, which latter worked out at the sum of £695, 18s. 2½d.

"You'll see I've put in a bit of a turret and a vane a-top of it, to give the house a style. It adds a little to the cost, but you will not repent it, madam. I've been and looked at the land. We'll put the house down on the lower ground, handier to the road; you'll have less depth to sink for water there."

Mr Barham was soon called upon to sign the contract. He ventured a remonstrance.

"My dear, more haste, worse speed. There's no such hurry——"

"Have you ever known me to squander money or act hasty?" his wife caught him up. "You'll see the value of your money now at last; folks'll respect us when they see the place we've built, and there'll be a nice bit o' property for Ephraim when we are gone."

Old Barham shook his head and murmured privately; but when the actual work began at Paradise he lost misgivings in the pride of his new consequence.

At first all Straldwick chuckled at the undertaking, its sense of humour tickled by the name of Paradise,

as it had been any time these hundred years. That name, as applied to the picture of desolation, was one of the parochial standing jokes; the others being Lunnon Town, three wretched cottages, and Ocean, where one saw the village pond. "Buildin' a house on Paradise? Well, that's the masterpiece." The yokels slapped their cords upon the tidings. But after Mr Dutt had spent an hour one evening at the Hand-in-Hand, when it became known that Mr Barham was not building the place for his own residence, but to let to gentry, opinion veered right round. Fresh gentry meant more money in the village, an easy job as handy man for someone, a vista of small doles and welcome patronage.

When the house was built at last, with turret and gilt weathercock complete, the future garden outlined with barbed wire, people walked out to see it in the summer evenings, and Mr Barham was delighted to show visitors round. It had cost him a cool thousand for the sake of certain conveniences not included in Dutt's original estimate; and by this time he had come to take a pride in the construction far exceeding that of his wife. She loved it as a milch-cow, for profit merely; he adored it for its own sake, as a toy.

They went together up to Ipswich to buy furniture. Mrs Barham sought the solid and old-fashioned. Mahogany and horsehair, rep hangings and beflowered wall-papers, produced in her the sigh of satisfaction. The modern fabrics and the light woods shown to her she waved aside, observing guardedly: "'Tis wonderful the way they get them things up nowadays." But when she saw a thing her heart

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approved, the price was always "reasonable," and she bought at once. The fact was, she enjoyed this regal shopping as she had not enjoyed an occupation since they closed the brewery. She had never felt that she could buy to make a profit, so had bought no more than was absolutely needful to keep life going in herself and her husband. Now everything she bought was for a purpose, to enhance the value of the fine new house, and at her death to go to Ephraim. Her spending took her husband's breath away.

But since the mood possessed her he deferred to it and, after the manner of subjected persons, took advantage of her preoccupation to gain a private object long envisaged. Having often to draw money from the bank, he drew for himself as well as for the house, intending not to want for drink in future.

The house, when furnished, was put up on Rackham's list, and no lack of possible tenants came to view it. Old Barham, who had bought an ancient tricycle, on which he looked like a gigantic spider, rode out to Paradise Lodge and showed them round; his lady gave them tea on their return to Straldwick. They went away with thanks and waving hands, but always wrote next day to say it would not suit them. Mrs Barham came to frown on such deceivers, and gave up the custom of providing tea. One day, when Barham returned from showing round a couple, he informed her :

"That's the furniture, my dear. The lady said as no one couldn't take a place with such-like furniture. 'Awful' and 'shockin''; them were her expressions."

Mrs Barham turned as red as fire and, rising, with her teeth and hands clenched, hissed :

“Just shows her ignorance! Them beautiful things! Turn 'em out, indeed, arter all the trouble we ha' took! Never you speak o' that again, John Barham! I tell you once for all, and you may know it, that, sooner than see them lovely things turned out into the road, I'll let the house stand empty until kingdom come, though that mean the loss of well-nigh fifteen hunderd pound.”

“Whoever talked o' turnin' of 'em out?”

“Well, don't you try it!”

This injunction secretly delighted Mr Barham, who, aware that the furniture was the chief objection to most would-be tenants, foresaw that the house would long be his to play about in.

In August, Ephraim and his young wife paid their annual visit. Mr Barham took them out to see the house. Ephraim was “in the grocery,” cashier and book-keeper in a big shop at Lowestoft, where his wife kept lodgings. The sharp little town-bred woman at once, on entering, fell foul of the furniture, scouting the very notion of such dull funereal things.

“They're good things; but they're no use, not for letting. You could have furnished at a third the price much more attractive. A few old plates such as stand on your kitchen dresser hung on the walls, a bit of pink or yeller silk ribbon looping up the curtains and stuck up on the mirrors and the picture-frames, wicker chairs and bamboo tables, all as cheap as cheap, but all the rage, and looking fresh and pretty.”

In vain did Mr Barham bid her keep her opinion

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secret. The rash young woman spoke her mind to Mrs Barham, who, as a consequence, thanked God when the vulgar, pushing slut went back to Lowestoft.

Mr Barham once more became absorbed in Paradise Lodge. Every morning he went thither on his tricycle, employing a boy to push him up each slight acclivity. His wife connived at his folly, since it allowed her to economise upon his dinner. He cared not what he ate up there at the Lodge, whereas at home he grumbled if the meal was scrappy. And she was glad that someone should be there to see no damage happened to the furniture, and make sure that the woman from the nearest cottage, who was paid to dust and sweep, did her work thoroughly.

In the course of that winter it occurred to Mr Barham to blend his two chief joys in one and keep strong drink at the Lodge. When he had hidden a bottle of whisky in the housemaid's cupboard, under lock and key, he came home in so blithe a mood that his wife growled :

"To look at you, anyone 'd think the Lodge was let, instead o' standin' there and costin' money!"

"That'll let fast enough next year, what with all the improvements!" Mr Barham assured her.

At heart he wished that it might never let. Though he was always quoting to himself the glowing terms of the advertisement, it was as one speaks praise of his beloved, for pure selfish joy. Standing at the front door, looking down across the waste land to the fertile dale, with Straldwick steeple in the distance, and the smoke

from the village showing up against the dark of far-off woods, he would think to himself "Wide views," and chuckle gleefully. "A highly desirable gentleman's small country residence"; "five bedrooms, three sitting-rooms, attics, kitchen, offices, stabling"; "fine, breezy situation, moorland," and "own grounds" were texts on which his mind loved to enlarge. Having paced through every room, looked out of every window and tried every chair, he would return to the kitchen for a nip of whisky, repose a minute till its warmth suffused him, and then start again. He often stayed there until after dark. Hanging a stable lantern on his crazy tricycle, he peddled home with a whirr and a rattle through the riven darkness, which, thanks to his potations, seemed a friend. The road was downhill or else level, save for one short rise, which, by good fortune, was before the cottage where the woman lived who did the cleaning. A call brought out the woman, or her husband, to push him up the little hill.

He grew so fond of this daily expedition that when summer came again he viewed prospective tenants with a downright hostile eye. The foe he dreaded came at last—a sensible old man, who chatted pleasantly. He had been in trade himself, he said, and praised the furniture. He was ready to take the house forthwith on one condition: that Mr Barham made a brick path to the washhouse. It was a small thing to require, but Mr Barham would not hear of it. The man insisted, argued, and at last grew angry. He went off, calling the owner an old fool. Mr Barham chuckled then, and rubbed his hands.

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"The same old tale—the furniture!" he told his wife.

Again that summer Paradise Lodge remained untenanted. When Ephraim and his wife returned in August, there were high words between the women, and the men looked shamefaced. The young people returned to Lowestoft in two days.

Mr Barham seldom got home before nine o'clock at night. Mrs Barham took to sitting with a widowed neighbour, like herself a Wesleyan. More than once when Barham came in late she smelt his breath, and said :

"Why, you've been drinkin'!"

"I just looked in at the Hand-in-Hand. Bein' a cold night, I felt the need o' some'at."

A kind of lassitude, involving wide indulgence, had lately come upon her. It is probable this cynical indifference, a kind of moral despair, had always lurked beneath her nagging habit. It was as if her disappointment over Paradise Lodge, the failure of her furniture to find acceptance, had made her tolerant of all that bore the look of failure.

"Poor old dear! He's old, and breakin' up! I ha'n't the heart to bully him," was her reply to her neighbour's strictures upon Mr Barham.

The villagers all sympathised with the Barhams in the matter of Paradise Lodge.

"Such a pretty place as they ha' made of it! But Paradise were always on-gain (they meant unprofitable), and on-gain that's bound to be, whatever way you take it."

It was said that the site was unlucky, that a curse was on it from of old ; then it began to be whispered

that the house, new as it was, was haunted. Uncanny lights had been seen in its windows, fearful noises had been heard there, late at night.

One morning, when Mr Barham called in at the Hand-in-Hand, to renew his store of liquor for the Lodge, he found the landlord talking with a tall, gaunt man, of visage brown and polished like old oak, a shepherd by pursuit, named Ikey.

"What do you think he's a-tellin' me, Mr Barham?" cried the host with his jolly laugh, "As your place up at Paradise be haunted. Silly talk!"

"The boy Teddy heerd a gashly, grindin' noise like monstrous teeth a-munchin' as he passed the place," replied the shepherd, quite impassive, in a high-pitched voice. "And Farmer Kettle, drivin' late from market, beheld a shape at the winder!"

"What o'clock might that ha' been, Ikey?" inquired Mr Barham, chuckling.

"Ezackly midnight were the hour!"

Mr Barham started. He had never stayed at the Lodge so late as that. Could it be that vagrants, dirty gypsies, had got in and slept there? He got upon his tricycle and peddled hard.

Arrived at Paradise Lodge, he searched in vain for evidence of such intrusion. "A pack o' lies! All nonsense, I'll be bound!" he thought to himself. But a sense of some uneasiness remained with him, making the whisky-bottle more than ever welcome.

He kept tottering about the rooms, gloating, adoring, returning at long intervals to fill his glass. About three o'clock he reached the height of happiness, and thenceforth gradually declined till when night fell he was full of shudders and saw

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shapes at every turn. The notion that the place was haunted now had hold of him. He wished to see the ghost, which was for ever dodging him. With this in mind he moved from room to room as quickly as he could, always perceiving the phantom just ahead of him. Pursuit became a panic in itself. He stumbled after, bumping himself against the doors, the furniture, yelling with rage and terror. It led him upstairs and through all the bedrooms, then down again and round the drawing-room, and then upstairs once more. He knew its likeness now:—It had a face nearly black like that of Ikey, the tall shepherd, red flaming eyes, and horns and hoofs. It was the Old Man himself, and Mr Barham knew that he must keep it in sight, or it would get behind him.

He fell and bruised his knee. The candle happily did not go out. Thrown over on its side it still burnt brightly, close to a curtain in whose folds the figure stood. Its flicker showed a face that grinned to mock him. He rushed at it and struck the empty curtain. He turned and saw the figure up the passage. He staggered after it. Then all at once it was behind him. Shrieking, he turned to see a sudden blaze. Flames were running up the curtain to the ceiling.

“You old muck!” he shrieked. “You’d set fire to my house, would yer, you brute, would yer?”

He strove to tear down the curtain to put out the fire, but the adversary fought against him; the curtain held, the flames still mounted. It was all no use.

He must run out and fetch help, if the foe would

let him. Cursing and hitting out at every step, Mr Barham fought his way downstairs and out into the night. As the chill air struck his face and hands they pained him, and he knew that he was badly burnt. At the same time he enjoyed a kind of lucid interval, had for a moment a suspicion of his own insanity; and in that moment came a sudden spirt of flame beneath the eaves. Out of the pitchy darkness leapt a thousand shapes—whin-bushes, thistles, grass-tufts—stained a rusty red; he could see distinctly the barbed wire fence; then all that vanished, till another burst of flame evoked it all again, with greater vividness. He heard a crackling sound within the house—the laughter of his foe. The place was done for. The flames shot out above the roof like serpents' tongues, causing the whole hillside to dance and flicker. Mr Barham gave a groan, and fell insensible.

He told the story on his death-bed, where he lay three months, and though the doctor and the Wesleyan pastor could not swallow it, his wife did. She was rigidly superstitious upon principle, and regarded doubt of fiendish visitations as sheer atheism.

"Better the Lodge than him, poor dear!" was her pronouncement; "though it breaks my heart to think of all them lovely things."

The cottagers, less logical in their conclusions, scornful of fact, have found another ending. When last summer I inquired the history of those blackened ruins out at Paradise, I was told that the spot was cursed for ever because old Mr Barham sold his soul to the devil there one winter's night, and was straight-way carried up in fire to heaven!

THE CORSICAN AGENT

AJACCIO,
The 23rd of March 1903.

To Messieurs Delamine Wolff & Company,
Bankers,
Paris.

MESSIEURS,—Following the instructions contained in your honoured letter of the 13th ultimate, I have interviewed ten of the principal creditors named in the list sent to me, residing in divers parts of this island; but in no case can I discern the least intention to pay the bank its due; while the expense of journeying has been considerable owing to the distance of most places from the line of railway, which has obliged me to hire carriages and even, in three instances, to have recourse to equitation.

Before taking legal proceedings, as instructed, I feel it my duty to warn the heads of the bank that, in the opinion of experienced Frenchmen here, such proceedings may prove useless, on account of the strange legal conditions here prevailing and of the extraordinary ferocity of the population. As an example of this last, I may mention that, though I have been here but three weeks, I find it necessary to claim police protection, having been shot at with a

rifle this afternoon while travelling in wild country not a league from this town.

Protesting my entire devotion and awaiting your esteemed commands,

FERDINAND JOYEUX,

Agent of the Bank in Corsica.

Having signed his name and dignity with a flying pen, Monsieur Joyeux sprang to his feet and paced the hotel bedroom. He consulted his watch; it was half-past one o'clock, and he was used to go to bed at ten! This discovery, revealing the extent of his mental disarray, increased it. Did his letter to the bank at all convey the horror of his situation? Snatching it up, he read it through again. No, it did not. He could picture its reception by a busy clerk, and the brief note of its contents sent up to the heads of the house: "Corsican agent unsuccessful so far, asks authority to take legal proceedings." And yet he, Monsieur Joyeux, the well-known manager of the bank at Lyon, the life and soul of the Cercle Littéraire in the Rue Barbet, the husband of the elegant and mundane Madame Thérèse Joyeux (*née* Touralou), had been fired upon with murderous intent, in broad daylight, not a day's journey from Marseilles, in a country forming part of the French republic! It struck an axe-blow at the root of common sense; his rotundity was outraged by it as no leanness could be.

"Pouf!" he blew out, "What a pig of a country!"

Feeling stifled, he threw back the window and looked out. The vision of fair moonlight on an empty drill-ground, fringed with foliage, a palm-tree

in the distance towards the sea, and the monument of the great Napoleon casting monstrous shadows, soothed him for a moment.

"Ah, what a night of love!" he sighed towards Lyon. But abruptly, with "Grand Dieu!" he shut the window. It had just occurred to him that it was rash thus to expose his person. Who knew but the assassins might be out there waiting. Just a bullet as he sighed there at the casement, and Madame Joyeux had been left a widow! "What an escape!" he sobbed, and, flinging himself upon the bed, gave way to tears.

The perils and the pain of equitation had seemed hard to bear; yet now they ranked as nothing since that crack, that puff of smoke, had come from out the brushwood. It was cruel to remember with what joy he had first welcomed this appointment. "The directors will be glad if Monsieur Joyeux can accept the task, as the nature of our business in the island has changed since Monsieur Dupont organised it five years ago, and requires more delicate handling." He could see the letter now, and recall his pride at reading it. At once he had written to Monsieur Dupont for information, and also to appease a colleague who might well feel injured.

"The Corsicans," wrote Monsieur Dupont in reply, "have a bad reputation, but personally I found them charming. All went smoothly. It is purely a question of tact when dealing with them. I regard the months I spent in their delicious isle as among the happiest of my existence."

Monsieur Joyeux set forth without one misgiving. How heartrending to recall that child-like confidence

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now that his soul was tortured in this vile inferno ! When Dupont came five years ago as agent of the bank, which dealt in mortgage, it was to dispense good money in exchange for papers. The communes and the nobles welcomed him with open arms. Now Joyeux came presenting papers and demanding money. He was shot at.

"Thérèse ! Thérèse !" he moaned. "If thou couldst see me now—how bruised in soul from the shooting—in body from the cursed equitation ; in what perils from the animosity of savage tribes ! . . . Ah, pray for me, divine heart ; pray that I may behold thee and our darling Mimi once again !"

He slept a little, lying down with all his clothes on, and, waking, found it daylight and the world astir. Bugles were sounding gaily in the barracks across the square ; a horse went clamping by ; a child was singing. Could it be true he had been fired at only yesterday ?

Having washed his face and hands, straightened his waistcoat, and applied some wax to his moustache and chintuft, Monsieur Joyeux took his coffee in the dining-room, and then went out and posted his letter to the bank. That done, he felt much better, conscious that he had done his utmost to obtain release. It was with something of his normal air of brisk urbanity that he entered the Café Continental, resort of the French colony, and saluted those who sat there.

"Bon jour, Monsieur Léricaud ! Bon jour, Colonel !"

He called for a little glass of cognac. A young

lieutenant of chasseurs came and joined him at his table.

"How goes it, my poor Joyeux? Quite recovered from the shock of yesterday? One gets used in time to the *bon jour* of this country and heeds it no more than the popping of a champagne-cork."

"Oh, there, my dear lieutenant! You speak as a soldier. As for me, I am a business-man and not courageous. The warrior spirit has no place in me."

"At all events I hope you will not leave us for that accident."

"Ah, that I cannot tell. I have written to my superiors, informing them loyally of the obstructions to be anticipated in the event of legal proceedings. If they bid me remain, I shall remain. It is duty before all things in this world."

"Spoken like a soldier! Bravo! The warrior spirit dwells in you without your knowledge. . . . But truly there is nothing to detain one here for pleasure. The scenery is fine, but I am not an amateur. Except for the sport and the women, one would die of boredom. You are not a sportsman, are you, Joyeux?—or a hunter of petticoats by any chance?"

"Sport, my lieutenant, is unknown to me. But as to ladies, I am not insensible."

"Aha! Then look about you here; I assure you there are oreads in this isle. Shy, and a little wild, and closely guarded—so much the better sport; one takes the risk. As a connoisseur of female beauty, look at this, dear sir!"

The young man sank his voice to a whisper and, unbuttoning the breast of his tunic, produced a photograph of the crudest country sort, much faded.

There was no doubt, however, as to the beauty of the face portrayed.

"What say you to that?" he chuckled, replacing the likeness and buttoning his tunic on it with an air of triumph. "Hair just the colour which our southern willows flush in spring before the leaves come out. You too are of the south; you know the tint I mean. And blue eyes, like the sea! We have our nest among the brushwood on a mountainside below the village where she lives; and what a nest of love! Sweet odorous shrubs, all round, and, far below, the sea, the colour of her eyes. Ah, that is the kind of landscape I find admirable! . . . I tell you this in confidence, dear Joyeux. You belong neither to the army nor to the island; you will keep it secret, swear! for if the natives got a hint of it, the news would reach her brothers and—pan!—a bullet from the brushwood and the end of me!"

"Is it so perilous?" gasped Monsieur Joyeux. "The mere conception of such danger horrifies me. My young friend, I implore you, say good-bye to her, and have done with such escapades. That bullet may surprise you any day."

"Who cares?" replied the handsome youngster gaily. "Life is too short to think of consequences."

"Well, I must be going," Monsieur Joyeux sighed regretfully. "To-day I proceed to Corte upon business of the bank; and to-morrow to Bastia. Tell me, they are cities, are they not? I shall not need a military escort there, or in the train?"

"Fear nothing. You can go alone quite well. Adieu, my friend; you have not too much time."

At Corte, Monsieur Joyeux met with more polite-

ness than had been his fortune in the country districts; he even gathered in a few small payments. This, and the hope that the bank would understand from his letter the hopelessness of recovering debts in such a country, revived his spirits greatly. In the relative civilisation of a port like Bastia, his experience among the maquis seemed remote as Timbuctoo. It was at Bastia that he received the answer of his employers in a letter forwarded from Ajaccio. He breathed a prayer as, with his penknife, he ripped up the envelope.

"Having received yours of the 23rd inst., we hasten to reply that we desire you to adhere to our original instructions, and invoke the law. The sales of land, thus effected, will realise our capital in the island and cover all expenses which you may incur. We grieve to hear that you have been the object of assault, and have made a note of same for complaint in the proper quarter."

Monsieur Joyeux pressed a hand to his forehead, feeling dizzy. For a moment it seemed that all the blood forsook his body; then it rushed back with an appalling vehemence, and the hotel-bedroom with its vulgar furniture swam round him in a redness. He had hoped for his recall to Lyon, to the routine he loved, to the domesticity of his pretty villa in the suburbs, to the rose-arbour where, on summer evenings, Madame Joyeux raised her splendid voice to Heaven, what time their daughter touched the light guitar. This homely joy had seemed quite close to him, and now it was withdrawn—perhaps for ever. Wretched luck! He was condemned to scour this savage island from Cape Corso to Bonifacio,

shadowed always by a hatred the more terrific because impersonal, directed not at himself but at the bare idea of him; to jolt on mountain roads with all the pains of equitation, while every bush gave forth its flash and crack, followed by a puff as leisurely as if expelled from the mouth of a placid smoker.

"Ah, Thérèse, pray for me!" he cried; then broke into a flood of tears, which did him good, for when he thought again, it was to realise the histrionic value of the part before him. "In the name of duty then!" he sighed with chest expanded. "I, Ferdinand Joyeux, sole, against these savages!"

Yet it was to mitigate the sense of solitude that, before beginning his gigantic task, he returned for a night to Ajaccio, where were compatriots who could estimate its heroism, and by their plaudits buoy him to a good conceit with it. Entering the Café Continental, he looked round for his friend, the handsome chasseur; but he was not there. A brother officer said that he had gone shooting in the interior. Some business-men present clamouring to know to what decision the great bank had come—

"Messieurs," said Monsieur Joyeux with a strong inflation. "We set the law in motion. It is war à l'outrance!"

"Bravo!" was cried. "But you will find it useless. In six months' time the bank will give up the attempt."

"Never! Is not Corsica a province of our France, and under law?"

"Ask the natives!" laughed a grey-haired colonel, eyeing his glass of absinthe with discernment.

"They will assure you France is their dependency; and there is something in it, seeing how they swarm in all employments. Besides, their deputies are always solid for the government in power, wherefor we shut our eyes to things in Corsica. . . ."

"Messieurs, we shall see!" said Monsieur Joyeux, buttoning his coat across his chest determinedly.

And they did see clearly in the days which followed; for, after journeying hither and thither for the space of two months, interviewing local officials, writing innumerable letters, harassed and sore, in ceaseless terror of his life, Monsieur Joyeux had achieved next door to nothing. The magistrates were themselves the chief obstructors. He wrote this to the bank, but it was not believed; and so he went on wrestling against heavy odds. At last he procured the requisite sanction for an important sale of land by public auction, and really felt as if the worst was over. The date was fixed; the sale announced by posters freely spread throughout the island. On the eve of the appointed day Monsieur Joyeux drove up from Ajaccio to the village of Calcatoggio, a gendarme on the box beside his driver. At Calcatoggio was a decent inn where he could spend the night, leaving betimes next morning for the place of sale. Alighting before this hostelry, he was hailed by name from its balcony, and, looking up, beheld his friend, the young lieutenant.

"What brings you here?" the agent cried, enchanted. "Sport, I suppose? Henceforth I adore sport, since to it I owe so charming an encounter."

"Welcome!" returned the other. "Here have I

been three days with no companion. Come up! We will dine together and drink wine of France!"

Having placed his valise, which contained important papers, in the bedroom shown to him by a bare-legged waitress, and locked the door on it, Monsieur Joyeux seized both hands of the lieutenant, crying:

"Well, what brought you here?"

The soldier went to the service-door which stood ajar and shut it, then led his friend to the window as the farthest point from any eavesdropper, before replying:

"Love, my honest Joyeux. Have you forgotten what I told you once down there? She lives not far from here; I meet her daily. But things are not so happy as they were. She has alarms. Her brothers, she declares, suspect something. They have questioned her, and she betrayed confusion. My friend, I am mad with love. I wish to marry her, but she refuses. Perhaps she thinks that I am only joking. I did deceive her at the outset, that is understood. It was trooper's love to start with—take all: give nothing—till my heart caught fire. She loves me, that at least is certain. She weeps each time we part as at a deathbed. I shall yet persuade her."

"But consider, my dear," faltered Monsieur Joyeux, slightly scandalised, "your position—and a young girl not well educated!"

"Were mountain-nymphs—were goddesses well educated? She is divine, I tell you!" the young man cried out. Just then the maid came in to lay the table, and their private talk was dropped till after dinner. Then when they were left alone, with

a bottle of wine between them and no further risk of interruption, the lieutenant resumed :

“To-morrow, please God, I shall persuade her to marry me. You spoke of her not being well educated. My friend, what does that signify in terms of love?”

“Ah, if it is true love, I will say no more. True love is above counsel ; but it is rare. And, after all, the lack of education is not irremediable. My wife’s sister, Mademoiselle Jeanne Touralou, has had notable success, with, let us say, backward pupils. She keeps a high-class boarding-school in the neighbourhood of Lyon. My daughter Mimi goes there every day.” The eyes of Monsieur Joyeux filled with tears as he recalled this detail of his domesticity. The lieutenant pressed his hand.

“Thank you, Joyeux. That may come in useful by-and-by. Be so good as to write the address in my note-book here. . . . And now, my friend, you yawn, you look fatigued ; it is time we both retired. Good luck to your sale to-morrow. Vive la France !”

But the sale was to prove the most severe defeat which Monsieur Joyeux had yet suffered in that land of disconcertion. The property offered was a fair estate consisting of a house—half farm, half chateau,—several cottages, and 500 hectares of land more or less cultivated. It spread out on a mountain-side, which caught the morning sun.

Driving up at ten o’clock, in the best of spirits, Monsieur Joyeux espied a crowd of men gathered beneath an ancient mulberry tree beside the house. Alighting, he advanced with bows towards the central

group of black-clad functionaries, who returned his greetings with effusion.

"A fine day, messieurs!"

"A fine day, in effect!"

Monsieur Joyeux observed the concourse of natives with satisfaction. They all looked like beggars, but might well be nobles of the land.

"Shall we begin, monsieur? It is the hour," said a frock-coated dignitary, on a glance at his watch.

Monsieur Joyeux took the chair proposed to him, and listened with complacency to much dissertation in a barbarous tongue. The bidding also was conducted in the island jargon, but to judge from the clamour, it was well contested. It was with absolute incredulity that he heard from the chief functionary:

"Three thousand francs; and to the old proprietor."

"What?" gasped Monsieur Joyeux; and when the statement was repeated: "But it is scandalous, it is unheard of. This does not cover the arrears of interest. And what then of the loan, our capital?"

"It is the law, monsieur."

Then Monsieur Joyeux, for the first time since he came to man's estate, lost his temper on a public occasion. With hands upstretched, he called down curses on the isle of Corsica—an isle of brigands, pigs, and filthy vermin. Since all the inhabitants were thus in a conspiracy to defeat the ends of justice, he would play into their hands no longer. The other properties on which the bank would foreclose mortgage, should be sold not in this land of scoundrels, but at Paris.

"I warn you, monsieur, that your words are action-

able," said one of the magnates present, smiling sourly. The crowd had caught the threat to sell Corsican land on the Continent, and was buzzing like a swarm of angry hornets. His gendarme caught the arm of Monsieur Joyeux, and dragged him back to the carriage, whence the outraged gentleman kept turning to gesticulate a menace at the group of malefactors until he was borne out of sight at a gallop.

Reaching Ajaccio at sunset, Monsieur Joyeux cabled to the bank in Paris; then, proceeding to his hotel, he made some documents into parcels, which he forthwith posted. Early the next morning he received this message :

"Certainly. The bank takes charge of the sale."

The sale referred to was of an estate called Saluccia. On three days in succession Monsieur Joyeux drove out to survey the property. With the gendarme at his side, he felt triumphant, believing he had found a way at last to beat the islanders. On the third day, as he was returning to Ajaccio, the mounted gendarme trotting close behind his carriage, two guns were discharged, one after the other, as it seemed in his very ear. The coachman lashed his horses, the gendarme charged among the bushes, swearing lustily. The latter had again caught up the carriage before the agent knew he was not dead.

"It is clear, monsieur," the trooper cried with warlike oaths, "that these accursed bandits only wish to scare you. They are dead shots and had you at their mercy."

But little reassured by this opinion, Monsieur Joyeux spent the whole of that night in composing his last will and testament, which took the form of a

farewell letter to his wife and child. This he gave in the morning to the landlord of the hotel, to be forwarded to Lyon in the event of his demise.

He did not venture out beyond the town, spending most of his time in the French circle of the Café Continental, till he was advised from Paris of the sale of the Saluccia property. It had been purchased by a certain Monsieur Charles Godet at a good price. The said Monsieur Godet was already on his way to Corsica.

Then a doubt assailed the agent for the first time : was there danger for the new proprietor? He consulted his amorous friend—banished from his love at present by her fear for him—who replied :

“No, I should not think so. He is more likely to be fawned on if he has money and is willing to scatter some of it among the islanders. Several “Continental,” as they call us, have their villas here in Corsica.”

His misgiving thus allayed, Monsieur Joyeux went down to the quay and welcomed Monsieur Godet warmly as the latter stepped ashore. He accompanied the new land-owner to Saluccia, and left him there at half-past four o'clock in consultation with the gardener whom he had brought from France. Four hours later, coming out from dinner, he was accosted by that gardener, who, with every evidence of horror, informed him of the tragic death of Monsieur Godet. The unlucky gentleman had been shot, while still consulting with his gardener, ten minutes after Monsieur Joyeux left his side. The narrator had seen no more of the murderer than a puff of smoke dispersing by a gap in the wall.

Monsieur Joyeux literally tore his hair. He went with the terrified servant to the prefect of police, and helped him with the necessary depositions, then drove out with him to Saluccia under escort of a score of gendarmes. Having done all he could to assist in this melancholy business, he returned to Ajaccio and cabled the appalling news to Paris. He then wandered, wringing his hands, weeping the moment he was forced to speak to anyone, till the answer came :

"Stay on a few days longer. Are memorialising government. Further sales here impossible. Purchasers afraid."

He gnashed his teeth and stamped with useless rage. Why could they not at once release him? He had borne enough, in conscience. One more shot from out the brushwood, and his mind would go!

In this state of mind he was found by the young lieutenant of chasseurs, who came to propose an excursion to the rustic inn at Calcatoggio. Monsieur Joyeux clutched at the offer of a two days' respite. Without business in the expedition there would be no fear; and to elude fear was a new and glad sensation.

But the lieutenant was unusually silent on the long drive, seeming absorbed in the ever-shifting mountain landscape.

"What is the matter?" Monsieur Joyeux asked.

"I will tell you later," was the answer in so grave a tone that the agent stared in horror straight before him. He began to suspect their trip was not for pleasure.

In the inn at Calcatoggio, his companion told him :

"I have not seen my well-beloved for six weeks. I can endure suspense no longer, so am going to seek her, in spite of her express command at our last parting. I may perish; but death will be sweeter than this life without her. My fear is they have done some hurt to her—those brothers whom she so much dreaded. To-night I mean to go and see. If I do not return by noon to-morrow, go straight, I beg, to the village named upon this slip of paper—it is but a walk from here—and take your gendarme with you. Go to the forge of Verri, as here indicated, and ask for his daughter Bianca. If she is still alive, which I begin to doubt, entreat her to go to France to the house of my mother, who knows about her and will love her as a daughter. You will find five hundred francs in notes in this pocket-book. Ah, it is a shame to entice you here, under colour of a jaunt, for such a purpose—you who have sorrows of your own. But you are my sole confidant in this land of pigs; and truly your sorrows recommend you, for my case is sad. Forgive me, Joyeux; I am selfish. But you will not fail me? Say!"

After trying in vain to turn him from his rash emprise, Monsieur Joyeux accepted the charge entrusted to him with a flood of tears.

Half-way through a sleepless night, he repaired to his young friend's room, hoping to surprise the lieutenant sleeping peacefully. He was not there, the bed had not been touched.

Next morning Monsieur Joyeux breakfasted alone, then walked about the village trying to imbibe the optimism of the splendid sunlight. So as not to feed suspense, as noon drew near, he walked some distance

in the direction opposite to that his friend had indicated. Returning towards the hotel he dared not look at his watch. The ostler told him the lieutenant had not yet returned. He ordered his carriage to be got ready and, summoning the gendarme, told him of his fears. Then at last he pulled out his watch. It was a quarter to one. He set out with a singing in his ears.

The name of Verri appeared in rough characters over the door of a small forge. The shade within seemed very dark. Two men, one old, one young, who had been bending over a heap of scrap-iron looked up and rubbed their shaggy brows at Monsieur Joyeux's request to see the girl Bianca. From their expression he believed they would have killed him but for the soldier's presence at his back. As it was the elder of the two made answer gruffly :

"Yes, you can see her—why not?" Taking a key from a pocket of his ragged coat, he went and unlocked the door of the adjoining hovel.

The room was so obscure that at first Monsieur Joyeux could distinguish nothing in it but the outline of a tall wardrobe. He caught a sound of heavy breathing, low down by the floor, and peering in the direction of that sound, discerned what seemed at first a heap of clothes, but presently resolved itself into the crouching figure of a girl.

"Bianca!" he murmured in the tenderest tones he could command. "I bear a message from your lover, from your Henri. Fly from this accursed land. Come with me to France, to the safe refuge Henri has prepared for you. Come, I implore——"

He got no further. Suddenly, as a serpent lifts its

head above its coils, a mat of red gold hair, a white face with great staring eyes appeared before him. The apparition gave forth an unearthly wail, Monsieur Joyeux fled into the sunlight. The father of the mad girl locked the door again, remarking grimly: "You have seen her."

"What have you done with my friend, her lover—what, foul carrion?" cried Monsieur Joyeux, seizing the man's arm.

"You mean the other continental?" said the blacksmith coolly, as he shook him off. "He has received his bullet. But we are not in the affair. He who did the deed has taken to the maquis; you will never catch him."

"What brutes! Ah, God! What monsters! What a country!" the agent kept ejaculating, as he was driven back towards Calcatoggio. "But they have gone too far this time; they have assassinated a French officer. Europe shall hear of it; dire will be the vengeance!"

"Do you think it, monsieur?" said the gendarme drily. "It is an affair of love, a scandal, so will be hushed up. All the same, I must return at once to Ajaccio and report the affair, and monsieur must accompany me for the *procès-verbal*."

"You are right," said Monsieur Joyeux. "We must hasten to inform the prefect. We will stop but the time to pay my bill at this hotel."

Upon their arrival at Ajaccio many hours were consumed by the announcement of the murder of the young lieutenant and the consequent interrogations and replies. Monsieur Joyeux then remitted his friend's pocket-book to the officer commanding the

garrison and, that done, repaired to his hotel in the small hours of the morning, a prey to the greatest distress of mind that man can bear without insanity ; comforted only by the reflection that his release was close at hand. He found this missive from the bank :

"We agree that it is necessary to wind up our affairs in Corsica. But there are many mortgages which have not yet been dealt with. We refer to properties in the more sequestered communes. We shall be obliged by your going without delay to the addresses mentioned in the following list."

The list contained a hundred names of places all of them distant and of cut-throat reputation.

"Oh, ta—ta—ta, poum—poum !" sang Monsieur Joyeux. He burst out laughing, then fell senseless on the floor.

In the archives of the bank at Paris there is found this entry, under date of the 25th of September 1903 :—

"Advised from Ajaccio of the death of our Corsican agent (Joyeux-Ferdinand) of sunstroke, caught while on a pleasure-trip in the interior. In the circumstances no claim for compensation made by his widow or heirs can be considered."

A cold epitaph.

K

FOUND IN AN OLD BUREAU

THE woman whose diary now lies before me may, for all I know, be yet alive. I never knew her in the flesh. Indeed I possess no other clue to her identity than may be found in her Christian name, Yvonne—a consideration I would plead in excuse for this publication, otherwise an indelicacy. On page 10 of the journal, treating of her betrothal—a French betrothal—it is written: “Monsieur said, ‘My little Yvonne, will you crown my life?’ To which mademoiselle responded, ‘Perfectly, Charles; is it not arranged?’ And then he embraced me with great propriety (*très convenablement*) on both cheeks.” The lady, you perceive, was quite alive to whatever of humour lurked in the situation.

Before Charles comes on the scene we catch glimpses of a schoolgirl’s ethereal passion, born of the first mysterious languors of awakening sex, for a beautiful youth, not named, admired from the window of a pensionnat—“her cloister,” she chooses to call it—a window overlooking a shady close where the fair youth is accustomed to walk in meditation, not all unconscious, mayhap, of the eyes of Mademoiselle Leroux’s fair boarders.

She calls him her “sweet unknown,” and his exit

is marked with the words, "My dear unknown is gone. For long he has not appeared to me in the old walk beneath the lime-trees. How dark the world! It may be he is dead. Lying awake, I seem to hear a knell. I find myself all desolate, fearing the worst." To which she appends a set of verses copied from Lamartine, or else echoed,—remarkable as being the only metrical entry in the journal, whereas the young woman of the period loved to choke her album with snippets from the favourite bard.

That is all we hear of love until Charles, the sanctioned suitor, comes on the scene.

The diary opens in 1850 at Mademoiselle Leroux's seminary—a select one, we gather—at Versailles. Even in those early days Yvonne displays a keen eye for costume. Brief enigmatical jottings, lucid enough to the writer, record observations made at Sunday Mass or out walking in what she despitefully likens to a jail-bird's dole of life. She would appear to have dreamed of dress at this period, for I read: "For my first soirée I dream a robe pale blue, with ribbons white, like that of a young girl at the dancing-class yesterday, only more rich of material." And a little farther down comes the shrewdest epigram she has yet coined: "A woman neglectful of apparel cuts as sorry a figure as a plucked peacock."

Released at length from school, she journeys to her parents in "this ravishing little city" (Geneva). French, not Swiss, are her people; and we find an entry concerning Calvinists which is distinctly creditable to sweet eighteen, unless, as I half suspect, it be but the echo of some remark by one of those

Gaulish frequenters of her mother's salon, whose wit she elsewhere extols. "These Protestants," it runs, "disgust me with their skeleton faith. Others have stripped the raiment from religion, but these have scraped the flesh from the bones."

Here is one for us: "The summer has come. It has been very hot to-day, and the city full of English pausing here on their way to the mountains. Everywhere one found them, errant, staring around them at little nothings, gasping 'A-oh—A-oh,' encumbering the streets. Some of them stared at our party, seeming to wonder at our being dressed for the town. They carry each a book. How papa laughed when I asked, 'Is it the Bible?' And Monsieur Charles, who speaks their language, translated my mistake to one of them lest they should think us rude to laugh thus. He says we are for them simply *des indigènes*. They are all rich people, he assures me, though dressed so strangely. It is a grotesque, antipathetic race, which I cannot tolerate."

We get more of the remarks of Monsieur Charles on men and manners, prefacing the entry of his proposal, a foregone conclusion. And then the diary assumes rather the character of a commonplace book, the legible entries being wide apart and dealing chiefly with abstractions. But there is no falling-off in the enigmatical notes concerning costume. Yvonne must have kept account of every dress she ever wore or saw worn effectively by other women, of the estimated cost of the materials, and any slight divergence she may have approved from the prevailing fashion.

I conclude Charles to have been much her senior. What else could have given birth to the reflection, "It is so easy for a grey-haired man to put up with the caprice of a young girl; but how difficult for a young girl to endure the foibles, the prejudices, of a man of that age. These are hard wood, while those are but tendrils."

Upon close inspection I fancy I have discovered a hiatus of some three years between that complaint and the following entry—during which time, no doubt, the book lay hid away half forgotten at the bottom of some trunk, or in the rarely used drawer of some piece of furniture like that late purchase of mine wherein I found it. To the hour of her discovering it again, and perusing it curiously with a riper judgment, I ascribe all the erasures—and they are many—in the earlier pages of the volume. Whole passages are crossed out: not obliterated for shame lest anyone should read, but cancelled by a single line drawn slowly through them, significant of a change of mind she would herself commemorate.

The journal comes again into use.

"Motherhood (*d'être mère*) is summer releasing frost-bound fountains. I am joyous as a cascade. All is smiling. Ah, my little one! My little one!"

"At church this morning the child Jesus smiled at me from the shoulder of that dear ugly St Christopher. I suppose he smiles like that at every mother."

"Now that I am a mother I see everything as a child sees it. I kneel low with my baby and laugh at sunbeams. My prayers are childishness (*enfantillages*)."

The nursing mother is the established goddess of

the elegant French, as she was the idol of their half-clad ancestors in Old Gaul. Pure reverence for the relationship of mother and child constitutes the morality of that nation, as respect of the fireside does of ours—the two worships being substantially the same, but distinguished by the cloak our mock modesty throws with averted face over any nudity however fair. It gives no surprise, therefore, to discover Charles prostrate before the live symbol of mankind's continuity, which alone gives power and majesty to the species. For what is one life, or one generation, detached from the rest? An extract, a mere quotation, a bar or two rent from the symphony. He is now *ce cher Charles, mon mari chéri*, and so forth, his hitherto prosaic figure tricked out in a rainbow garment of reflected love, gift of the throned goddess to the unswerving votary. His paternity sprawls without dignity at the outset, and I find some of his delirious babblings gravely registered by madame as words of wisdom. These I forbear to quote. Have I not seen the squeamish islander turn sick at sight of the kiss on both cheeks exchanged with tears by parting greybeards at a railway station? Cannot I picture his cold scorn at the shameless exhibition of drunken joy offered by this peep-show of Monsieur Charles floundering in the first great wave of paternal sentiment?

With the woman it is different. In our repugnance to any tribe of a reasonable colour, there is a tacit reservation favourable to their women. Even the furious anti-Semite would exempt a charming Jewess from the dreamed-of massacre.

Broken cries of rapture come from Yvonne in her

"dear little villa by the placid lake," where "the mountains loom in the distance like strong guardians." The birth of a son and heir has transformed her dwelling to a temple. Nor is Charles the only worshipper. Friends, possibly colleagues of his, though we get no hint of his employment, come in the cool of the evening with offerings of warm sympathy. A lady, Blanche by name, stands pilloried in the diary for her officious proffer of advice, herself being a mother of but six months' standing. A certain young man wins a strong note of approval from madame for his adoration of babies, and one quickens to the scent of a prospective lover. A Frenchwoman, she should have a lover. The island brain demands it. At present the unweaned babe is in the way, but we cherish hopes for by-and-by, being most brutal of taste in our readings though haply lambs in the market of real life.

Now, as if to glut our savagery, comes the strangest entry of all, and one which has very greatly perplexed me. Amid the tuneful prattle of mother to babe it lifts its head suddenly upon us like a snake from the flowers:—

"Half-way up the mountain-side we turned into a pathway, he and I, judging from its apparent course that it would lead more directly to the summit. It was a narrow path, but little trodden, following a ledge beneath a steep face of rock, in places overgrown with brushwood, which he often paused to part and hold aside for my passage.

"We had proceeded thus for a long while, and were beginning to wonder a little when the path would take the upward turn anticipated, when a bush

grown right across our way engrossed the attention of my dearest. He parted it, and I made haste to press through the gap. Judge of my dismay to find myself on the brink of an immense gulf, of a precipice dropping sheer to the plain. I looked down one second, fascinated, beholding the roofs of a village, roadways, a whole map of flat country between my feet.

"Vertigo seized me. The instinct of safety flung me prone among the bushes, heedless of thorns tearing my face and hands. Lying thus, my feet projected over the chasm, and in my deathly terror, powerless as I felt to scream or move, it seemed that my body must inevitably follow—that I should never dare to make the effort to replace them on firm ground lest the movement should dislodge me.

"My darling's cry still sounds in my ears as he sprang to my succour. But—oh, how can I live to tell it! Careless in his care for me, he stumbled and fell. I saw grey death in his face as he clung half on, half off, the brink one agonised moment.

"'Help! Your hand, for the love of God!' I stretched no hand to aid him whom I would have died to save. He clutched my robe; I could feel the strain. It seemed he would drag me down. I strove for life. I struck at him with feet and hands, a struggling beast in mortal terror. I beat him off. He swung out over the void, upheld only by a low branch of the bush which masked the murderous path. I could hear his miserable gasping prayers as he hung there in the jaws of death. My soul became the branch by which he held, straining, about to snap.

"At length it gave. There was a noise, a crack, the crumbling of a little earth.

"All that was conscious in me fell with him, gyrating down, down, faster and ever faster, with a rush that choked and stunned ere came the killing shock.

"For long I lay as dead on the brink of that sepulchre. It was sunset when I again beheld the scene. I know not what force enabled me to find foothold and retrace the broken path. I moved in the gloaming helpless, hopeless, upon the mountain, like Pilate in search of a lake. Would to God that I had died with him! My soul! my soul is lost!"

What means this tragic page, think you?

Close upon it, under the same date, follows the inventory of a new frock, a description in which I can only decipher the word "*eau-de-nil*," the rest being cryptic, in a kind of shorthand the writer has gradually evolved for her use in this kind of jottings. The beloved of the mountain-side was not her husband, witness the entry two pages farther on: "A man a little unwell is a distress, like toothache, to the wife tending him. A little rheumatism makes Charles insufferable: he gives one no repose from listening to complaints and fears. Curiously, when he is really ill, his behaviour is of an angel. I have read this of men."

"A lover!" says the savage hunger within us: and dramatic instinct clamours in the same direction. I leapt to that conclusion on a first reading. But the succeeding pages yield no evidence of the settled melancholy such a tragedy would inevitably have cast on a spirit so imaginative, supposing it not to have

destroyed her reason. And farther on she has written :

" I am thirty-five, and to-day, looking in my mirror, I perceive certain grey hairs. I grow old, and have not yet known love."

The hypothesis of a lover must be dismissed, I decide with reluctance, my palate craving the rich flavour of tragedy seasoned with romantic sin.

No. This brief scene, I contend, is fiction, not fact ; and, like all sound fiction, is but truth in bloom. Which of us, young enough to look forward on the possible development of his life's story, does not, while casting himself resolutely for hero, now and then experience a shudder at that same self's potential villainy ? I think there is no one, under God, entirely free from such misgivings. The worst nightmare for high-souled man or woman is thus to realise a capacity for turning base upon emergency.

Yvonne, I conjecture, knew that anguish of self-distrust quickened by a mother's solicitude, which is at times a sword in the bosom of any woman. Looking forward, she paints on years yet blank, portrays her son on the brink of manhood, his mother's companion, lover-like in his care for her. That a moment's panic might turn her to her child's murderess is a reflection most awful in the light it throws on our instability. Her little fiction is a human confession as salutary in its lesson of humility and distrust of self as ever ghostly director heard from kneeling penitent.

The discrepancy of the passage with other contents of the book is striking enough to justify my dwelling on it. Here and there lies a thought not ill-

expressed, but always, so to speak, in the rough. I can discover no other attempt to give to one that artistic shape which, for products of the brain, amounts to personality—a play as instinctive with some of us as the shaping of dough or soft clay by a child. Yvonne kept this book for a purely personal record, designed for no other eyes than her own. Had it been otherwise, had there been any back thought of an audience, the notes would certainly have been more frequent, consecutive, and of deeper elaboration.

I suppose Yvonne's husband either retired from his business, whatever that may have been, and returned to end his days in his native land, or else was called there in the course of his avocations; for a few lines dated from Châlons-sur-Marne tell of nostalgia for her "dear lake and the violet mountains walling paradise." The French are no colonists. In whatever country fortune sets them, France is the kibleh towards which they turn morning and evening; and in the end, if life lasts, they will return thither. The exact distance from the frontier matters not: out of France is exile. No doubt the change of residence was long foreseen, discussed, and looked forward to.

Yvonne, whose acquaintance with the fatherland consists in recollections of Paris and its environs as spied from the seclusion of a boarding-school, is disappointed. Life in a provincial town holds little to compensate her for the parting with old friends, loved surroundings—the fair lake now blue as the Ægean and glistening to the sun, anon a pearl, an opal, in dark setting of a shadowed land; the lake craft with spread white wings, seeming at rest on the

polished surface glassing them; the lake gulls screaming as they wheel, light as snowflakes, upon a background of blue lake, blue sky, and distant wavy mountains faint in haze. In the forecast she had drawn on her memories of Paris for hopes to alleviate the pain of uprooting, had dreamed of illumination from researches in the metropolis of dress, her art: the fact was but Châlons—the prefect's wife, the general's lady, and a bevy of provincial belles behind the fashion. Geneva had more the air of capitals. She has been at pains to set down the grounds of her dissatisfaction, perhaps to convince herself that it is reasonable:—

“I cannot comprehend my husband's infatuation with this place and its inhabitants. But then he spent his boyhood here; no doubt that accounts for it. For me, I find it so far from Paris.”

She makes the commonplace remark, “Some women are what they wear,” without preface or elucidation of any kind.

She is struck with the social life of her compatriots, some of its aspects being new to her. “I am astonished by the vivacity of my countrymen, and their excessive fatuity in youth; as if the mere good luck to be a man (I translate freely) carried with it a right to the intimate favour of every lady. It seems to me that the men of a certain age only are tolerable; that may be because I myself grow old unawares.”

“Society here is so limited that its members regard every well-bred newcomer as a grand acquisition. I am, for the moment, ‘the new woman’ courted by all the men, old and young, but chiefly by the young,

for whom the supposed experience of a woman neighbouring forty has the fascination of a locked treasure house. How I should have enjoyed it years ago! How well I should have amused myself! And now it is all nothing to me. In the ball-room I think not of any partner, but of my little ones at home. Yet I am assured by Rosalie (her husband's niece, I learn from other entries, younger by two years than Yvonne) that I have enslaved two young gentlemen, by their own account. The silly boys! Ah me, how old I am!"

"The censoriousness and, be it said, the general chastity of the married women surprises me much, considering the novels they devour and the laxity of their conversation *entre femmes*."

I notice that brocade and watered silk of such dyes as *gris-perle*, *bleu marin*, and black have superseded more girlish fabrics in the record of her personal apparel, indicating that she feels the burden of advancing years, though she cannot at this time have been more than seven-and-thirty. Her wearing of materials in advance of her age, by lending a certain piquancy to a womanhood still fully attractive, would account for some of the admiration she accepts so languidly.

Of passing events, of the great inundation of France from the north-east, we learn hardly anything, though, if still resident at Châlons, she must have been in the thick of the movement. The book contains no personal note of those troubled months, though the record of dress is uninterrupted. I suspect that this had become habitual with her, like the keeping of household accounts. Only—a significant

difference—these memoranda rank with her inmost thoughts, are kept under one cover with her soul's record.

At length we get: "They say Paris has fallen. I feel no grief for that, rather a little relief that the end has come at last. Can any woman, I wonder, be at the same time a true human mother and an enthusiast for war? My boy curses the Germans with the airs of a big man, promising himself to avenge France when he is grown up, while, as for me, I embrace him with a silent prayer from the heart that wars may cease ere then."

She is struck by her apathy in the public cause. Absorbed, with every one about her, in watching the national drama, she had expected at the least to experience some grief at the humiliating catastrophe so fiendishly derisive of the predictions made by popular enthusiasm a few months before. Instead, she finds herself dumb to a blow which is ringing on the hearts of all her people. She is moved only with a fantastic apprehension for her child. This alone, of the whole lurid flare which scorched up the Second Empire, she deems worth recording.

Forcing herself (one feels the effort) to drop some appropriate sentiment for a tear on the ashes of her country's honour, she adds: "Ah, that poor emperor!"—a cry all womanly; but rank heresy, patriotically speaking, at an hour when the foot of a foreign conqueror was bruising the bare neck of France—through Napoleon's fault, people said.

Maternity has shelved Yvonne, dramatically, as it removes every honest woman from the interest of the crowd that gapes after the abnormal. She is a

planet in its place, a being of defined activities, a familiar object unheeded of the multitude; not an escaped thing running riot, a comet which folks crick their necks to gaze at. But to the pale student of the heavens dear is the planet, full of great tranquil wisdom of the planning mind. I protest deep reverence for the very limitations of the wife and mother.

Yvonne has had her curious promptings towards the forbidden fruit of the garden, but these have scarcely amounted to temptation, I fancy. She has yearned, doubtless, after that mocking wildfire which will appear periodically alluring to every warm-blooded man and woman — the perfect mate, a creature to justify wild courses. But from the beaten road, tame though not distasteful, she has not diverged. Looking back from the bleak highland of forty, she admits disappointment. The road pursued, from thence, is all so same, and there were pleasant paths to right and left. But she is not quite serious in regret. She has children.

“I am old, and I have never known the love we dreamt of as young girls, nor can I remember ever to have known that dream quite realised in the case of others. It is a dream, a vision unattainable as perfection, yet existent somewhere I believe and trust.”

“I understand why maternity is honoured of God Himself. It is the one state untainted in our life down here. Of other joys we touch but fragments; this is full. O holy Mother of God, we hold to God by thee!”

This is the last entry in the book, of a personal

nature; the actual last is one of those inventories of costume to which I have had frequent occasion to allude. The record ends abruptly, midway on a page, as life ends mostly—an argument for life's continuance somewhere, if there is any purpose governing it.

TALES OF THE ONE REPUBLIC

L

THE WISE MEN OF PETIT-PRÉ

THE year was one of public rejoicing throughout Switzerland, for in it occurred the birthday of the Federation which is observable only once in a hundred years. In the Canton of Neuchâtel, which, till 1857, was a principality vested in the King of Prussia, enthusiasm ran as high as in the older cantons; in a certain unimportant rural commune which I call Petit-Pré, it ran higher even than at Berne or Zurich. The place, with its 500 inhabitants, was as much a unit of the republic as any city, and, being small, was all the prouder of its entity. It was with disfavour that the citizens of Petit-Pré heard rumours of a project for the grouping of villages in the coming celebration; holding that each village republic—that is, commune—ought rather to emphasise its independence than to sink it on this occasion. The proposal had been discussed and rejected among them weeks before it was made. Members of the communal council were in no doubt as to the course expected of them when they received a deputation, composed of the vice-president and the treasurer of the commune of Bernier, one night in April in the village school-room.

The president of Petit-Pré, Monsieur Auguste

Favre, agriculturist, sat back in his chair, fingering his pleated chin and blinking at an oil-lamp with a metal shade which hung above the centre of the plain deal council-board. His eight colleagues, also agriculturists, imitated his demeanour as far as in them lay; while first one and then the other of the delegates spoke for Bernier. Bernier, it was represented, was the chief town of the district; it had ten times the population of Petit-Pré, from which it was distant less than three kilometres. Why should not the commune of Petit-Pré join forces with Bernier at the approaching national festival as those of St Médard, of Valpinet, and of Ombresson had agreed to do? The result would furnish a spectacle of more magnificence than any one of the communes could achieve separately, together with an edifying exposition of unanimity and brotherhood. When, all this and more having been said, the delegates seemed exhausted, the president of Petit-Pré stood up and cried:

“Gentlemen, you have heard the proposal of our friends from Bernier. It is for you to reply, accepting or refusing that proposal in the name of the commune.” He sat down again, and at once fell to fingering his chin and staring at the lamp as before.

The schoolmaster, Monsieur Klaus, who sat, as clerk, at a small table by himself, but was in truth the moving spirit and intelligence of the council, touched the broad back of one of the members at the board and, leaning over, whispered in his ear. That member sprang to his feet, as if galvanised, exclaiming hoarsely:

“If the celebration is to be in common, why should it be held at Bernier and not at Petit-Pré?” He

sank back as suddenly, and, pulling out a handkerchief which was also a map of Switzerland, mopped his face with it.

"But, gentlemen!" cried one of the delegates in extreme surprise, "is not Bernier the chief town of the valley—as it were, the elder brother of its other communes?"

The elegant, town-bred French in which this query was enmeshed intimidated the peasant audience. But the schoolmaster, inured to culture, answered:

"The right of primogeniture is unknown in our republic. It is the appanage of monarchy and oppression."

Technically and strictly, Monsieur Klaus had not the right to speak till he was spoken to in that assembly. But to-night he could not be still, regarding the proposal of the deputation as an attack on himself with intent to deprive him of a chance of distinction. In Petit-Pré he would, of course, be pageant-master; whereas in Bernier, which boasted greater lights, he would be nobody at all.

"Monarchy and oppression," he repeated, rolling the r's formidably, as if those words epitomised the aims of Bernier.

"That is true, very true," came in chorus from the members of the council; one of whom stood up and gave it as his opinion that all the communes were but younger brothers; that they should keep the feast, to which they all looked forward, separately; which meant together, in the true fraternal sense—Petit-Pré like Bernier, instead of Bernier alone finding itself illuminated and full of the sweet sounds of music, while Petit-Pré lay deserted, dark, and silent

beneath the stars. Applause followed this peroration. The picture of their village desolate was very moving.

"But surely, gentlemen, you will not decline our proposal summarily?" cried the vice-president of Bernier.

At that the elders of Petit-Pré again hesitated, fearing lest the word "summarily" might involve some penalty, and wishing that they had the code at hand to look it up. Again the schoolmaster, who was known to have the code by heart, spoke out, to their relief.

"Each commune has free choice in such a matter," he pronounced judicially.

"But, Monsieur le Président——!"

"I will put it to the vote, monsieur."

The motion that Petit-Pré should join with Bernier in the rejoicings otherwise than in spirit as behoved true brothers was unanimously rejected.

"But at least," pleaded the vice-president of Bernier, "the people of Petit-Pré will not abstain from assisting at the patriotic discourse, which Monsieur Elie Pom of the Federal Council will deliver in the square at Bernier at eleven o'clock in the morning of that great day."

"Fear nothing, monsieur. We shall not forget our brothers."

The delegates then withdrew, leaving the village fathers with a sense of duty done. No sooner did the president return from speeding the departing visitors than Monsieur Klaus cried:

"If I may proffer a suggestion to Monsieur le Président, it is that we at once appoint a committee and a director and inaugurate the festal work.

Members of the council will be *ex officio*, that is understood, and in addition——”

“Wait! Wait, in mercy, Monsieur Klaus! Allow us time to think,” the president stopped him with a touch of irritation. In that room, with the implements of his daily work around him, the schoolmaster was apt to forget the respect due to the council, his employers, and admonish them as small children. Monsieur Klaus, rebuked, ran the handle of his pen through his stubble of fair hair and bit his lip hard, looking down. Having given the snub due time to take effect, the white-haired president pursued calmly :

“What say you, my colleagues? It seems to me a good idea. Monsieur le Pasteur must sit with us on the committee and, if I may suggest it, my daughter-in-law Julie. In a question of costume and of decoration the ladies will demand their say.”

“Aye, the ladies may be useful,” replied the councillors indulgently. “There is the wife of the pastor, who has such good taste; and the widow Pictet, who has so much money.”

“And if I may proffer a suggestion,” put in Monsieur Klaus, himself again; “Mademoiselle Rose Bonnaz, my colleague of the girls’ department, could set her young ladies to work upon the costumes in the hours assigned to needlework. Would you add her name?” he asked with deference.

“Let it be so. Now we are complete. Monsieur Klaus will have the goodness to draw up the list of names and to notify those members who are not here present.”

The schoolmaster bowed, speechless, a prey to

great embarrassment. He was sucking his pen convulsively, and moving about in his chair, very red and uncomfortable. The agriculturist with whom he lodged, his usual mouthpiece on the council, came shortly to his rescue, saying :

"Gentlemen, I have the honour to propose that Monsieur Klaus take part with us on this committee, and that, seeing the satisfaction he has always given in the organisation of our annual school feast, he be appointed director of the feasts, under the orders of the said committee."

This motion was immediately seconded.

"A good idea, indeed!" said the president with benevolence. "Who more deserving than our excellent Monsieur Klaus! I will put it to the vote at once."

Monsieur Klaus bit hard at his pen, and tried to frown as if he thought of refusing. He believed that he had enemies, and smiled sardonically when the motion was carried without one dissentient voice.

He then, with the approval of the council, drew up a project of rejoicing which included an open-air service, a banquet, a procession, the illumination of the schoolhouse, and fireworks. But it was on the procession that his thoughts were focussed in the days which followed; for that alone offered scope to an erudite imagination. It must demonstrate the whole history of Switzerland, her progress, her institutions, her religious and social freedom, her intellectual and political superiority. It must convey a patriotic lesson to the minds of all beholders.

The episode of Tell and Gessler; the league of the Forest Cantons, Zwinglius, Calvin, Napoleon I.; the

retreat of the French from Sedan upon Neuchâtel, when the Swiss massed their militia on the frontier and forbade the Prussians to traverse it under arms; the past, both recent and remote, was present with him. His speeches before the committee were historical lectures. They displayed such control of the subject in all its bearings that, after the first two meetings, his colleagues left it to him; merely stipulating that whatever he decided must be kept a secret from the men of Bernier, who were known to be watching Petit-Pré with jealous eyes.

It was not till the preparations were well advanced, and many of the dresses finished, that any voice was raised against his management. Then at a meeting in the president's house, a crowded meeting in a narrow room, Madame Julie Favre, *née* Bonnivet, the president's daughter-in-law, made a vexatious suggestion. Madame Julie was a town-bred lady, who had been to a boarding-school; she was also heiress of a hundred thousand francs. With her a certain elegance had invaded the old chalet, where the president and his wife, and his sons and his sons' wives, dwelt under the same roof with stables, pig-styes, granaries—a roof resembling that of Noah's Ark. Flowers and books appeared there. She was not a lady who could be suppressed or ridiculed. Her wish to figure in the pageant had from the first been pronounced; but her possession of a baby two months old had been considered disqualifying. She now objected:

“Monsieur Klaus, in your love for the past, you are forgetting the present and the future.”

“Pardon, madame, not at all. The Communal

Council, bringing up the rear, expresses the present perfectly."

"And the future, Monsieur Klaus?"

"Madame, I do not know how one can represent the future, seeing it is not yet known."

"Ah, Monsieur Klaus! Monsieur Klaus! It could be done so easily! Do not our dear children represent our hopes of it? Let the children, I entreat you, join in the procession, not as children merely, but dressed up somehow to express futurity."

"They should have wings like little angels. Ah, it is ravishing!" cried out the widow Pictet, who was sentimental.

"Then," Julie continued, "I would have mothers with young babies, walking in front of those children. I myself will gladly carry my own darling Alfred, though he is so heavy."

"It is delicious! It is exquisite!" The women flung themselves on Julie.

"It is a fine idea!" exclaimed the pastor in the background.

"You will go and tire yourself, Julie," grumbled the president.

"It is an idea!" murmured Monsieur_Klaus, for whom applause had weight. "First, the glorious past, and then the present, and then the future bringing up the rear."

"Never!" cried Julie, horror-struck. "The future leads!"

"That is true, Monsieur Klaus," said the president gently. "There is no gainsaying that. One looks forward to the future; one looks back upon the past. Therefore the future is in front."

"And the more remote the future," added Julie, "the more in front it is. Therefore, the mothers with their babies must walk first."

Monsieur Klaus himself was puzzled for a moment, troubled with a sense of being spun right round. Yet, to have women exhibiting their young at the head of the procession, which makes or mars effect, was inadmissible. The composition of the tail did not much matter, provided only that the tail were long. In a tone of high insistence, he rejoined :

"That may be, mesdames et messieurs ; none the less is it a fact that the past always comes before the future—in civilised countries."

The confidence of his opponents was something dashed by this announcement.

"But why? Explain to us, dear Monsieur Klaus!" challenged the privileged Madame Julie.

"Because, madame—because——" Monsieur Klaus sought wildly in his brain for a word, and, seizing one, the first to hand, produced it solemnly ; "because, madame, it is precedent."

The effect of this definition was magical ; it flashed conviction into every brain.

"Ah, precedent!" sighed Julie, disappointed.

"Ah, precedent. My faith, and so it is!" exclaimed the president, and smote his forehead. The pastor also murmured :

"Very true."

"So the mothers must be content to walk among the hindmost," Julie pouted. "But, dear Monsieur Klaus, you will at least dress up the children in some pretty fashion? Not in their usual clothes, I do implore you!"

Monsieur Klaus, acceding to her prayer gallantly, at once fell deep in thought upon the subject, all the women watching him. Raising his eyes at length, he asked :

“What say you to the colour of hope—the blue of heaven from whence all hope descends?”

“It is a beautiful idea!” exclaimed the pastor.

“I call it ravishing!” sighed the widow Pictet.

“Yes, that will do all right,” conceded Julie, who still sulked a little.

So it was arranged. Mademoiselle Rose Bonnaz and her sewing-class, with everyone in the village who could use a needle, set to work on sky-blue garments for the boys and girls. And this activity, like everything else concerning the pageant, was kept jealously hidden from the folk of Bernier, whom Petit-Pré defied in all fraternity.

At last the great day dawned—without a cloud. From an early hour the village instrumentalists blazed out stirring patriotic tunes before the school-house, which showed flags at every window. They went on doing so, with short intervals, till half-past nine o'clock, when the pastor stood forth in his gown and bands upon the schoolhouse steps, and bawled :

“Mes frères!”

At once the crowd was stilled, every man took off his Sunday hat, and gazed devoutly at its lining if it had one. The sermon lasted half an hour. It was followed by prayers of a patriotic character put up by private individuals; one of whom, the oldest inhabitant, spoke so broad a patois that the children giggled till they caught the pastor's eye. A few hymns were sung; the president cried “Vive la

patrie!" with a flourish of his hat; the band struck up once more and started marching, and the whole assembly moved off up the long straight poplar avenue to Bernier, chanting:

"O monts indépendants!"

At Bernier in the market-square, a lame man with a studious face harangued the crowd from a temporary stage, on which sat the communal authorities, each wearing, as did every member of the crowd, a red and white rosette with the Federal Cross in its centre.

"Mes frères!" he kept on crying.

As he grew excited and indulged in gestures his lameness grew more painfully apparent. The Federal Council is composed of invalids, it was mentioned in the crowd; how should it be otherwise in a land of workers?

When the speaker sat down after an hour and a half, more songs were sung; and then the people of Petit-Pré straggled back to their own village through the hayfields, under the dark pine-forest which hid half their sky. At the heavy mid-day banquet in the schoolrooms, there were more speeches on fraternity, more songs, more shouting of "Mes frères!" But minds were absent, dwelling on the triumph soon to come, the great procession. Now Bernier should see, and learn for once!

By four o'clock all the constituents of the pageant were mustered before the schoolhouse by the energy of Monsieur Klaus.

He stood a moment, mopping his brow, and smiling proudly as his eyes ranged over them, before he gave the signal to advance. The band struck up, the head

of the procession moved off gaily ; at length the forward impulse reached the very tail ; all was in motion. Monsieur Klaus then ran and overtook the vanguard, to which, as the patriot Stauffacher, he of right belonged.

There was the Past—ten ranks of historical persons, male and female, in grand costumes, some hired, some made on purpose ; and then the Present—members of the Communal Council all in sober broadcloth, each wearing a black hat shaped like a pork-pie with a brim to it, the gendarme in his uniform, the pastor in his gown and bands ; and then the Future—children clad in blue from hat to knee, with a twinkle of white stockings and white shoes beneath, followed by some twenty mothers carrying babies, and a few fathers bearing heavy children, before whom walked the village butcher with a banner thus inscribed : “The Future—Hope of the Fatherland.” An unorganised crowd of men and women brought up the rear.

The band played, the children sang :—

“Roulez, tambours, pour couvrir la frontière !
Au bord du Rhin guidez-nous au combat !”

as the procession crossed the fields to the first halting-place, a group of châteaux under the eaves of the forest, where Monsieur Klaus had arranged that all the historical persons should strike proper attitudes : Tell should take aim at the apple, Gessler should scowl tyrannically ; the reformer Zwinglius should strike his Bible ; the three original patriots should visibly renew the oath sworn centuries ago

upon the field of Uri, and so on ; the same thing to take place at every halt.

Arrived at the first châteaux all went well, no one forgot his part, the children sang "O monts indépendants!" with all their might. And yet a sense of failure came to everyone. What was it? Everything seemed perfect.

The singing flagged perceptibly, the posturing relaxed. All at once a voice cried :

"This is stupid. No one is looking!" It proceeded from the deep throat of the reformer Zwinglius.

Exclaiming : "What ails these peasants? Are they all asleep?" Monsieur Klaus precipitated himself against the door of the nearest châtelet. "Hi, père Carteret! Awake! Come out and look!"

"I am not within! I am here with all the family!" piped an old man in the rear of the procession.

"It is droll," muttered Monsieur Klaus, with an attempt at gaiety. "It seems they are all out with us, the inhabitants. Forward!"

At his command the pageant moved again, but somehow limply. There was no more singing. The very children drew dejected faces, and whispered anxiously among themselves. When again, at the next halt, there were no spectators, the horror of the marchers became loud-voiced and angry. Where were the mountain-herdsmen with their wives and families who of right belonged to Petit-Pré? Where, but at Bernier, persuaded, doubtless by the promise of a grander show?

"We are betrayed!" cried Gessler, furious. And

the cry was taken up down all the ranks. Some women, many children, wept aloud. But Monsieur Klaus called "Look!" and tears were staunched, sobs died within the throats that bore them. There, sure enough, at the next halting-place—a spot where three roads met among the fields—an old man stood expectant, holding two children, one with either hand. The youngsters had been kept from school by illness, their grandfather was in the last decrepitude.

In a trice the procession wore its pristine air, the faces brightened, steps became elastic. The old man smiled his satisfaction, showing toothless gums; the children waved their hands and cried out: "Vive la patrie! Vive Petit-Pré!" The trio ruled the commune; all was done for them.

But the rally was short-lived. When the old man and his grandchildren were lost to sight, the rout was total. In vain did Monsieur Klaus essay to cheer the marchers, even shame them, into perseverance. They kept falling out by twos and threes, and making off sullenly across country. It was no procession that returned to the starting-point but a series of despairing groups, eccentrically dressed. This was a pity for a goodly crowd from Bernier, which had come down, elder-brother-like, to cry "Bravo!" was waiting for them in the open space before the school-house.

"What is it?" asked a member of this crowd, struck by their disintegration. "Has a disaster overtaken you?"

A girl of Petit-Pré replied:

"Ah, you say well: a disaster! Picture to your-

selves our chagrin : there are no spectators ! Every-one takes part in the procession."

Her blabbing set compatriot teeth on edge.

The men of Bernier took some seconds to grasp the meaning of her words. Then a guffaw went up. "No spectators ! Heard one ever the like ? No spectators ! Oh, good God ! Good God !" Men slapped their knees and hugged themselves, bent double with amusement.

This was much more than injured Petit-Pré could bear. The reformer, Zwinglius, cast away his Bible and flew at the throat of the foremost man from Bernier, screaming out "Infamous traitor !" In a trice a dozen separate fights were raging. The men of Petit-Pré who were angry drove back the men of Bernier who were amused. Women screamed, and so did children. Monsieur Klaus, who might have kept some order, was fighting among the fiercest. The president and other elders used foul language never heard from them before. The pastor sprang upon the schoolhouse steps and cried "Mes frères !" again and yet again, but no one heard him.

The illumination of the village at nightfall was performed in sorrow. The fireworks excited only the smallest children as yet unskilled to read beyond mere form and colour. Petit-Pré had become a byword for collective zeal.

M

THE VILLAGE GENDARME

A SHORT man of five-and-thirty, with a heavy dark moustache and a pair of drowsy grey eyes, by name Michel Bonnaz, he was generally to be seen on week-days leaning on the handle of a spade in the little patch of garden upon the slope behind his chalet, his uniform coat and waistcoat hanging near him on a gooseberry bush. Thus, pipe in mouth, a straw hat on his head, his aspect was peaceful but for legs which, encased in blue trousers with a broad red stripe down the seam, still spoke the penal character of the man.

On Sundays and feast-days it was entirely warlike. Although the groundwork of his uniform was blue, the impression upon the mind of the beholder was of something very red approaching. Heavy epaulets of red cloth squared his shoulders; red braid adorned his close-fitting swallow-tailed coat; red stripes of preposterous width ran down his trousers. To see him strutting churchward, walking stiffly by reason of his belt's exceeding tightness, with moustache waxed to two minute points, and the peak of his shako much impeding sight, was to realise the essential dignity of law and order.

Never within the memory of man had he taken

anyone of the village into custody, with the exception of a small boy, who had broken a window of the schoolhouse with a stone, and a little girl, whom he had found astray among the mountains and led home to her mother. Brawling was common enough in the cafés, and knives were drawn now and then in hot blood. But Michel deemed it unneighbourly to arrest the culprits; contenting his conscience with an appearance in full uniform upon the scene of riot after all was over.

But to vagrants, beggars, and destitute foreigners he was a terror. I saw him once hurrying across the square, holding a ragged Italian by the wrist at arm's length. The man lacked the papers necessary to establish his identity, therefore Michel was leading him before the president of the commune. As he passed by the windows of the schoolhouse with his prisoner, the Sister of Mercy in charge of the infants took occasion to point him out to young offenders.

The sight disturbed me, being myself an alien and having, for the time, mislaid my passport. I mentioned my fears to Michel when we met, and begged for a few days' grace, that I might procure a certificate of my birth from England. With a lofty gesture, he disdained the very notion.

I had no need to be anxious, he assured me, having money in the bank, and living at the best hotel the place afforded. It was not likely I should become a charge upon the commune. With that Italian rascal it was different. He changed the subject, which he seemed to think beneath my dignity, for that of the mischievousness of his own small daughter, in which he seemed to take a pained delight.

"Ah, monsieur, I assure you, she is terrible! No one would believe a child of eight could do the things she does. She respects no one; she even set her tongue out at the curé when he scolded her. She throws stones at every object; she tears all her clothes. Each day I fear to hear she has transgressed the law. It is terrible for a man in my position." He paused, expecting me to put in something.

"What is her name?" I asked.

"She is called Pauline. My aunt, who keeps the house, is always in despair about her. It is a misfortune to have one child only. Were there another, she would be content to play at home, and not run off into the village and take part in mischief. All the same, at bottom, she is good, the little one; only too lively, so that she must be always doing."

Upon my return to the hotel, I retailed this conversation, as I do most things, to my landlady.

"It is true," she exclaimed, "the child is all he said. And yet I like her better than all the children of the village. Her face is so droll to watch, and her words come out so pat. The fact is, poor little one, she is sadly spoilt at home. Her father gives her everything she asks. It is his own fault she has grown to be unmanageable."

After that I kept a lookout for Michel's daughter, and one day met her going home from school. She had red hair, a snub nose, and big brown eyes which sparkled with mischief, even as she cast them down demurely when I spoke to her. After the first greeting, I never know what to say to children, and I was feeling more embarrassed than with any grown-up, when she came to my relief.

"You are English?" she asked, pertly, glancing up into my face.

I replied in the affirmative.

"Yet you do not look mad!"

I professed myself glad to know that my looks did not belie me.

"But I have heard my father say that the English are mad," she insisted, with a petulant stamp of her foot. "He has travelled and he reads the papers. He must know!"

I was trying to explain away her father's meaning when the gendarme himself emerged from a chalet close at hand, and strolled leisurely down the road before us.

The child drew close to me and whispered: "He is funny, isn't he, my father? He looks just like a cock in his fine Sunday clothes, and he walks exactly like the one we have at home."

Suddenly she thrust a stone into my hand.

"Throw!" she commanded.

"Where?"

"At him—at my father!" She stamped her foot imperiously.

I had aimed, and all but let fly at the broad back of the unsuspecting gendarme, before I recollected myself, and said severely:

"Oh, naughty! You should venerate your father!"

Instead of showing indignation at my disobedience, she only pouted and looked disappointed.

"You are not mad then! What a pity!"

With those words she left me, running on to pour the story in her father's ear. I saw the gendarme stand and scratch his head, and eye

his daughter with a comical dismay. Then he strode back towards me with hands outspread in deprecation.

"She is terrible—this girl!" he groaned. "To behave thus to a person of consideration. I entreat your pardon for her. If her mother had lived, all would be different! Or if there were another child in the house to be a playmate for her."

Having assured himself that I was not offended, he pursued his homeward way, leading Pauline by the hand. I could discern not a trace of displeasure in his bearing towards her.

July of that year was a memorable month for Bonthex, by reason of a landslip, which destroyed acres of pine-forest, and dammed the torrent, so that its waters rose and overflowed the lower pastures. I remember being roused from sleep by the clangour of the tocsin, and seeing from my window the square swarm with men and women in every stage of undress. For days we were all at work upon the débris, and not for a month could one be certain that no lives were lost.

But for Michel Bonnaz that July was chiefly memorable for the number of vagrants who came to the village. The gendarme had little leisure for his gardening now. He wore his uniform from sunrise to sunset, parading the village, visiting each of the cafés in turn, demanding papers of every foreigner he met. That rather vacant solemnity, which had formerly been the badge of Sundays and feast-days, was now the habitual expression of his face; save when it leapt to sternness at sight of a ragged coat or a foreign-seeming slouch hat. Bonthex looked on and

smoked its pipe, amused with the activity of its public functionary.

This respectful amusement ripened to genuine awe when Michel one fine night surprised a whole tribe of vagrants—seven in all—asleep in a barn behind his chalet, and led them straight before the president, whom the lateness of the hour compelled to receive them in his night-gear and a pair of trousers.

A day or two after that great capture, when Michel's fame was at its height, walking on the slopes below the village, I caught sight of something red among the brushwood in a little gully, and left the path to see what it could be. What I discovered was the gendarme, seated in the shade of an elder-bush with a girl of about thirteen, evidently a vagrant. Michel's famous handkerchief, with the arms of all the cantons, was spread upon the ground between them, serving as table-cloth for some bread and cheese, which the girl ate hungrily. The strange pair had their backs towards me, and supposed themselves in private, till I said politely :

“Monsieur Bonnaz !”

The gendarme leapt to his feet with an oath. The girl with a similar exclamation bounded off into the bushes.

“Ah, monsieur !” said Michel, when he saw who it was, with a pitiful pretence at unconcern, “you take advantage of the fine weather? Dame, you are right ! We have had so much rain these last days.”

Then suddenly he changed his tone, and began to speak quickly and earnestly, growing redder every second.

"You have caught me nicely; but you are a foreigner. You have no connection with the politics of Bonthex. I will tell you all; but first, I demand your word of honour that you keep my secret. You saw that little girl who was with me. Well! I found her an hour ago asleep in the forest. I roused her—that is my duty—and asked who she was. She seemed faint and weary. When I asked of her parents, she began to cry. She has brown eyes and reddish hair, which remind me of Pauline. From what she says, it seems her parents were so cruel that she ran away while they were giving a performance at St Théodule. They are travelling jugglers, it appears. She showed me bruises on her legs and arms, which her father made with a stick. Mon Dieu! it is unbelievable. A father indeed! What I think is, that these jugglers have stolen her, quite young, from respectable parents. One reads of such things in the papers."

"You will take her to the president," said I, "for classification, and then, I suppose, to the good sisters at the school?"

Michel turned redder even than before.

"I mean to take her to my house," he said. "I have a married sister living in Italy, who has not been heard of for years. This girl speaks Italian better than French; I shall say she is my niece from Italy. That is why I was taking her by this path, so that people may not see her till her clothes are changed. She will be a good companion for my Pauline, being gentle and timid as much as Pauline is the contrary."

"Why are you doing this?" I asked curiously.

He pushed aside his shako, the better to scratch his head.

"I love little girls," he volunteered; and then, "I know the law of my country. I ought to know it if you think that I have been in charge of the legality of this commune for fifteen years. If I took her to the president he would make inquiry for her parents and the law would oblige her to return to them, which she does not at all desire. In fact, it cannot be pleasant to return to those who made the bruises which she showed me. She cries each time one speaks of it. Now I must be going. Bear in mind your word of honour."

When he had gone from me a little way, he stopped and, putting his hand trumpet-wise to his mouth, called down the ravine. The girl emerged timidly from the brushwood and stood a moment on the alert, ready, it seemed to me, to take to flight at a whisper. Reassured, she glided swiftly to his side, and I watched them pass from sight behind a grassy buttress of the mountain. I wondered how Michel would contrive to win over his aunt and housekeeper—a cantankerous person—to acquiesce in his proposed adoption of a vagrant; and the next day he confessed to me it had been difficult; he ascribed her conquest to the exhibition of those bruises whose existence still incensed him beyond measure.

I saw much of Michel Bonnaz in those days, for he naturally gravitated towards the only man who knew his secret. Of this he was jealous to the verge of indiscretion, going about with a face so evidently barred against inquiry that it was a marvel everyone did not inquire. He was gruff when spoken

to, especially resenting all allusion to his niece. So sudden and complete a change of manner was, of course, remarked. It was said that he was angry because his sister in Italy had sent her little girl to be a charge on him ; which seemed not unnatural.

However, his activity with regard to vagrants was unabated. He even seemed to become sterner with such gentry. In its communal capacity Bonthex was still pleased with his alacrity, however, socially, it might regret his surliness.

The gendarme himself was bitterly conscious of his false position.

"If these people knew the truth," he said to me, "they would shun me like a leper. I, who have acquired a certain renown by my rigour towards vagabonds, to be harbouring one of them ! I shudder when I think what they would say !"

I advised him to proclaim the truth and ease his mind, to take the curé or the president into his confidence ; but he shook his head decidedly.

"If I took her to the president, it would be his duty to send her back to her parents, who are real beasts. It is difficult to believe, monsieur, but my aunt, who undressed her the night of her arrival, found the marks of a whip upon her back and bosom. When my aunt noticed it, the child cried, and confessed that her father used to strip her naked, tie her to a bedpost, and then whip her. That, even more than the bruises, won my aunt."

"But why not tell the curé ?" I inquired.

Michel sighed profoundly and hung down his head.

"Monsieur le Curé would be horrified at my hypocrisy. He would command me to proclaim the

truth, as penance. He is not of those who give absolution while the sin continues. I had better keep it secret for the present."

The plague of vagrants ceased, a dearth succeeded. People began to forget Michel's late activity in the public service, and his present gruffness as an individual became a grievance. Still nobody suspected the truth of the matter, and the girl might possibly have passed as his niece to this day, but for a catastrophe induced by the stupidity of Michel himself. Through excess of caution he had kept the truth from Pauline, giving her, with the rest of the world, to understand that the visitor was her cousin. No sooner had the first shyness of their intercourse worn off than Pauline began to ply the supposed cousin with questions about her home, and, finding her answers to disagree with the gendarme's account of her, went to the latter for an explanation. Michel, in a temper, bade her mind her own business, which was no solution. There was a mystery, and she could not rest till she had fathomed it. Well for Michel if he had told her all from the first, extorting a promise of secrecy, as he had from me!

One Saturday evening as I sat on a bench beside the door of the hotel, admiring the snowy summits across the valley, the butcher stopped and asked if I had heard the news.

When I shook my head, he sat down beside me and taking his pipe from his mouth, explained: "That Michel Bonnaz! We were wrong when we called him a miser: he is something worse—that is, a criminal!—a traitor to the commune, which employs him. He, who was believed to be the enemy of all

mendicants—you will never believe it, but it is true all the same—he has concealed one in his house feloniously. That girl he said was his niece turns out to be the daughter of some travelling jugglers. Pauline discovered it and told the other children at the school. It is a crime, I tell you, to withhold a child from its parents; and it is our gendarme, of all people, who is guilty of it! He, who pretends such zeal against all vagrants, has been harbouring one of them for more than a month. Bah! it is disgusting! He will be well punished!”

My informant did but mildly express the general indignation. Nowhere in the world are men pleased to learn that they have been hoodwinked—least of all in a small community where it is the pride of every man to know his neighbour’s business.

Even my landlady, usually most charitable, was bitter in her denunciation of the hypocrite that evening. When I hazarded a plea in Michel’s favour, she exclaimed :

“It is ridiculous! If the parents of the girl were so cruel to her, is it likely that the president would permit her to return to them? On the contrary, he is the kindest of men. And there are laws against cruelty to children. Does Michel imagine that he is the only man in the village who has charity? They say he went up to the presbytery this afternoon—to confess, no doubt. Monsieur le Curé will have something to say to us at Mass to-morrow!”

In the morning, as I watched the people flowing to nine o’clock Mass, I was aware of a flutter of quite secular excitement in the throng. It was the general opinion that the curé could hardly fail to make

mention in his sermon of the hypocrisy of Michel Bonnaz. And after Mass, when the notices for the week were announced from the steps of the school-house to the free citizens of the commune, some proclamation concerning the gendarme's crime was confidently expected.

I saw Michel himself cross the square, holding his little daughter by the hand, painfully conscious of the averted faces of the other church-goers. Behind him walked his aunt and housekeeper, decently clad in black, accompanied by the cause of all this trouble—Michel's pretended niece. As they passed the school-house at the corner, a Sister of Mercy came out and walked with them, chatting pleasantly.

A Sabbath calm succeeded for the space of more than an hour—a calm enhanced by the hum of insects that was in the air, broken only by the splash of water in the basin of the fountain and thrice by the ringing of the sacring bell. Then the stream of population flowed again; the cafés filled.

“Mon Dieu!” exclaimed my landlady with handkerchief pressed to her eyes as she burst into the room where I was sitting. “It seems he is a saint—this poor Michel! Monsieur le Curé did not mention him by name, but it was clear. ‘He who clothes the naked and gives shelter to the weary’—we know who that was meant for—is more agreeable to the good God and the Holy Virgin than those who only take care to keep their homes respectable. Ah, Michel will be proud, if he has understood!”

There was no mention made of Michel Bonnaz in any of the notices read aloud from the steps of the schoolhouse that morning. Was the Communal

Council going to overlook his crime? Some indignation was expressed by the group of Liberals, of which my friend the butcher was the leader. This man, though a devout and even superstitious Catholic, called himself an anti-clerical. He assigned to the State control of the whole natural world, for which he acknowledged no commandment but expediency. In a Protestant canton he would have been a Conservative with the same views, but in Bonthex he was considered dangerously advanced, and gloried in the reputation. The curé's sermon he denounced as an attack upon the commune's privileges, an unwarrantable interference in things secular. Individual charity, in his idea, was now as obsolete as Noah's Ark. To relieve the poor was the function of the State — that is, the commune; and private persons who presumed to do it should be put in prison. But the sense of the commune was against these sentiments. As a result of the sermon, Michel was made drunk that evening.

It was on the following Tuesday, as I was walking down the zigzag road, which is the sole approach to Bonthex, that I saw the gendarme leaning on the handle of his spade, in the garden beside his chalet. His uniform coat adorned a currant-bush.

"Ah, monsieur!" he exclaimed, raising his hat in reply to my polite inquiry, "I have suffered much. If the curé had shown himself less kind, I should have died of shame. And to think that it is my own daughter who betrayed the secret! But the poor child did not know. She cried all day when she learnt she had disgraced her father."

"And the other girl—the daughter of the juggler?" I inquired.

"She is at present with the Sisters. I am sorry to lose her. Monsieur le Président went yesterday to St Théodule, seeking news of her parents. It seems they have gone no one knows where. He was prepared to proceed against them for cruelty. On his return, he summoned the Communal Council, and it was decided to adopt her in my name. That is his kindness, you see. I was resolved to adopt her in any case, but now I shall receive an allowance from the commune for her board and lodging. There was opposition from the Liberals—I do not wonder, being a Liberal myself, and thus ashamed—but it was overcome. She is very ignorant, and it is judged best that she remain with the Sisters for the present. They will teach her all that it is good to know. But henceforth she is considered as my daughter."

I left him leaning on his spade, his face expressive of such genuine satisfaction that I could not but wonder at the simplicity of the man, who could thus rejoice at burdening himself with a responsibility which was bound to add greatly to his cares in life.

A SUPERIOR PERSON

A RAINY day spent alone at a village inn is seldom a memory upon which the mind loves to dwell; least of all when that inn is located in a remote Alpine valley, and the rainy season coming in the heart of summer affects the traveller with a sense of injustice as well as discomfort. When he has tired of reading back numbers of the local paper, has written letters until the squeak of the pen upon the paper has become a burden, the demon of boredom drives him to the window and forces his mouth open in a mighty yawn.

There is no solace in the outlook. Mists, driving up the valley, curtain off all view of the mountains. A fleeting glimpse of rock and pine-tree, blurred over and lost as soon as revealed, is all that nature in her prudish mood allows. A girl going to the fountain with a piece of sackcloth over head and shoulders is a sight to be thankful for. The clatter of her pattens on the cobbles of the place relieves the ear accustomed to monotony of wind and rain. The chalets, tanned by exposure to all weathers, hold a storm-cloud in the shadow of their brooding roofs. The puddles of the road, the water in the basin of the fountain, the wet stones of the "place"—surfaces that catch and

hold what light there is—are tinged with the prevailing brown.

The day of which I have to write was very rainy. I had sat until three in the afternoon in the parlour of the Hôtel-Pension de Bonthex, killing time as best I could, when, going to the window for at least the hundredth time, I heard the jangle of bells and the crack of a whip. A closed carriage drawn by two dejected horses jolted over the stones. It drew up to the hotel. The driver, looking like a gnome in his capuchon, jumped down, stamped on the pavement, and smote his chest with swinging arms as drivers will.

I hoped for English people. I was disappointed. One man alighted, and that man a foreigner. At a glance I guessed him Swiss on account of his hat—the soft black hat, so stiff of outline, which adds stolidity to every Switzer's head. The rest of his costume might have passed muster in any one of the capitals of Europe, yet seemed out of place in Bonthex upon such a day. It consisted of a frock-coat, light trousers, and patent leather boots. A heavy gold watch-chain adorned his black waistcoat, a diamond sparkled on his hand as he raised it in gesticulation to the driver. "Commercial traveller," I thought, and turned away.

There was a sound of footsteps on the stairs, and my landlady's voice raised higher than the key in which she generally welcomes visitors. I judged thence that the newcomer was an old acquaintance. The carriage had scarcely driven off upon its homeward journey before I was enlightened on this point. The good lady bustled into the room, wiping her

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hands upon her apron, as her custom was. She sank upon a chair near the door.

"Mon Dieu!" she exclaimed, with hands and eyes raised, "it is impossible. Who would have believed it? You have seen, monsieur? It is Pierre Tripet, son of old Hippolyte the wood-cutter. He has been many years at Paris, and they say that he has made his fortune; at least he gives himself airs! Only think, monsieur! Just now he demanded the best bedroom, and when I told him it was occupied already by an English gentleman, he frowned and bit his lip. He said—you will pardon me, monsieur—that these cursed English push everywhere like weeds. He commanded hot water for his room, and gave a host of other orders. Yet one has known him as a little boy—the dirtiest and most snivelling of the village. Also it is curious that he comes to the hotel instead of going to his father's house, where there is room. And he has not inquired concerning his parents—not a word. It seems that in making a great fortune ideas are changed, and one forgets old friends. He did not seem to recognise me in the least."

With that she left me to get ready the meal which the newcomer had ordered.

I had ample opportunity of making and improving the acquaintance of Monsieur Pierre. The wet weather lasting for some days, we were thrown much together. He seemed possessed with an idea that I was unhappy at Bonthex. When I told him I had come there of my own free will, and that, did I not enjoy my stay, there was nothing to prevent my leaving any day, he replied that it was very kind of me to say so, but that he, having seen the world,

could quite understand how dull his native village must appear to foreigners. He evidently thought me to be pitied, and showed a tendency to take me under his protection, which I duly, if privately, resented.

His presence robbed the evening chats with my landlady of all their charm. The good woman was wont to regale me with weird stories of ghost and goblin, of men and women bewitched, of the procession of the dead flitting across the moonlit pastures, through the shades of the forest, to strains of unearthly music. Her belief in all these things, and her tearful pity for the poor souls condemned to spend their days buried up to the neck in some glacier, and their nights in wandering about the mountain-side, until the prayers of the living should release them, were so genuine and unaffected that I too believed. But the presence of Monsieur Pierre changed all that. On the very night of his arrival I happened to question her concerning the story of Olive Cornut—a maiden who, being consumedly fond of dancing, danced away from Bonthex one fine night with the devil for partner—a fact seen and attested by many people, some of whom, my landlady assures me, are still living. Ordinarily the question would have set her talking with scarce a pause for half an hour or more; but now she only shrugged her shoulders and declared it was all nonsense. She turned apologetically to the new arrival.

“Monsieur Pierre knows the stories which our peasants tell. It is terrible the superstition that exists among our mountaineers. But civilisation—civilisa-

tion advances with great steps. All that will pass away."

Monsieur Pierre withdrew his cigar from his mouth, looked down at the diamond on his little finger, and said :

"It is laughable—very laughable! At Paris one would not believe it possible. The life of the great city gives no time for fantasy. There one is occupied with the great facts of life ; one leaves the things of the other world to the priests and the old women."

"I believe you!" said my landlady emphatically.

Monsieur Pierre had been three days in the hotel with nothing to do before he found time to go and see his parents. The weather was so bad. However, on the first fine morning he set out ; and I, strolling down the village, encountered Samuel the butcher at the door of the post-office.

"Fine weather," he observed gleefully, "and the barometer continues to rise."

Some three months previous, on a visit to the plain, Samuel had been inveigled into buying a barometer, which now stood in the window of his shop, an object of inordinate pride to its owner. He would allow no one to hit it but himself, and he took to himself all honour for its prophecies.

"You have a comrade at the hotel," he said abruptly. "Well, how do you find him? What do you think of his clothes?"

I replied that they seemed quite good to my poor judgment.

"Dame! I spit on them! He, Pierre Tripet, whom I have known from a baby, to come here dressed like that, and with such airs! It is too

much! . . . He has gone to see his parents. He will find his father ill of a strange malady. Ah, monsieur, there are things one cannot speak about except to those who know already."

He assumed an air of mystery. .

"I believe you," I rejoined with sapient mien, and waited.

"Well, since you wish to know," resumed Samuel after a pause. "His father is bewitched. Someone has put the evil on him, so they say."

"But who?" I cried with proper horror.

"It is precisely that which he must find out if he wishes ever to recover; and to that end somebody must take a journey. In our canton there are no wizards. To consult such one must descend into the plain and then climb into the mountains of Vaud. There one finds villages entirely inhabited by sorcerers. I repeat what people tell me; I have never been there."

His tone of banter left me doubting if he himself believed a word of what he said. To test the point I gave a scornful laugh. At once my friend grew frigid and surveyed me with contempt.

"Ah, yes, I know!" he said. "In the great world men laugh at all they do not understand. But tell me, is it more extraordinary that a man of Vaud should find a charm to heal a Valaisan, than that my barometer should announce the storm while it is distant."

With these words he turned upon his heel and left me.

When I met him again that evening he seemed to have forgotten our slight difference. We had both

stepped out to smoke a pipe and watch the afterglow. The sun had set, and twilight filled the valley ; only high in air a wild rose flush still lingered on the distant snow-fields. The mountain summits seemed to have survived the world.

"Pierre has not yet returned ?" he asked.

I replied in the negative.

"Talk of the devil, he comes out of his hole. There he is!" The butcher pointed up the road with the stem of his pipe. "He will have found the house too warm for him—he who believes in nothing. Last night in the café he was saying that he had no fear of souls returning from the other world. With those ideas, he calls himself a Liberal! He thinks that irreligion is the same as Liberalism, setting a bad example to our youth. Well, we may try him one fine day. It is for him to go to the wizard and procure a remedy. His mother is too aged. He will fly from Bonthex." By this time the subject of our conversation had drawn near. "Ah, Monsieur Pierre!" exclaimed Samuel, as one entranced. "Speak of an angel and you see his wings! We were just speaking of you, Monsieur Pierre! How goes your father?"

"Very ill," replied Pierre curtly ; then turning to me, "If monsieur is returning to the hotel, we can go together."

But Samuel was not to be thrown off. He walked beside us.

"You have much changed, Pierre, since the days one well remembers," he remarked, glancing side-long at the personage. "How dirty you were! and how your father thrashed you! Dieu! time passes. I feel old already."

"How goes your lady, Monsieur Samuel?" asked Pierre gruffly.

"You mean Julie? She is well, I thank you. Except that she is extremely fat and the mother of a family, one could well say she has not changed at all."

At the door of the hotel, at last, Samuel left us, regretting that his duties as a member of the communal council precluded his inviting us to drink a glass of wine. Unhappily he was due at the house of the president. It seemed a shame to waste so fine an evening over dull accounts. However, the barometer was keeping steady; he could promise us as fine an evening for to-morrow.

"Everyone is mad in this village," exclaimed Monsieur Pierre, when we were alone together in the hotel parlour. "The superstition of these peasants is quite inconceivable! You and I, monsieur, who belong to the great world, can laugh; but it is dreadful, none the less!"

Yet, despite his position as a member of the great world, he did not seem at all inclined to laugh. Something had happened to deject him. All his airs of superiority were gone. He sat in silence for some minutes, frowning at the date upon the stove. It was characteristic of the change in him that he looked at the stove, and not at the diamond on his finger. Then, as on a sudden resolution, he turned to me.

"Listen, monsieur," he said in a low tone. "My father is very ill, and the doctor who saw him yesterday assured my mother that the end is near. But the old man has ideas. He supposes that some-

one in the village has bewitched him—'cast the evil on him,' as they say here. It is laughable, is it not? I laughed myself. But that is not all. He wishes me to make a voyage into the canton of Vaud, where, he says, there is a sorcerer who can defeat the enemy. When I refused he cursed me. Both he and my mother think—it is so laughable—that Providence has brought me here for this sole purpose, whereas I came here of my own accord, for change of air. One stifles at Paris in the summer. Picture to yourself, monsieur, if I make this voyage they will speak of it in all the canton during centuries. I think I had best return to Paris. What do you think?" He took a cigar from his case as he finished speaking, cut the end and placed it between his lips.

"I think that, in your place, I should go," I said.

"Monsieur means that he would quit Bonthex," put in Monsieur Pierre eagerly. "That is my opinion precisely."

"On the contrary, I should go to see the sorcerer."

"It is impossible! Monsieur laughs at me!"

"Not at all, I should find such a visit very interesting. You must remember, Monsieur Tripet, that I have never in all my life-time seen a sorcerer. Besides, what would the world say were you to quit Bonthex when your father is at the point of death? Your departure would cause more scandal than your going to see a sorcerer, only to gratify the whim of a dying man."

The personage stared. "You are not laughing at me?"

"There is nothing to laugh at—at least, not at present. You may find something to laugh at when

you see the sorcerer. Think what a story you will have to tell your friends. People will fête you when you return to Paris."

"I see nothing amusing in all that," said Monsieur Pierre, relapsing into sullenness. "It is only a peasant, you understand, who gives himself out for a sorcerer. These peasants are all fools. I was born and brought up among them, so I ought to know. If it was a palmist, or anyone whom one recognises in the great world, I should not hesitate, but a peasant—bah! People are only too ready to laugh at a man who has created for himself a certain position by force of industry."

"I have told you what I should do in your place."

"Well, I will think of it. Say not a word of this to anybody, I pray!"

Two days later it became known in the village that business called Monsieur Pierre to St Théodule. As the day was fine he set out on foot, and I, at his earnest request, walked a part of the way with him. Below the village the road follows the windings of the mountain-side for about half a mile, through meadows and cultivated lands. Then it is lost to sight in the shadow of the pine-trees.

No sooner were we well in the forest, out of sight of the village, than Monsieur Pierre pulled my sleeve and plunged into the shade among the tree-trunks. I followed, thinking him mad. The place is steep—so steep that I have sometimes wondered how the pine-trees keep their footing—and the bare rock crops up, grey and slippery, in many places.

As soon as he thought himself hidden from the road, Monsieur Pierre sat down on a stump and

opened his valise. I stood and watched his doings, holding on to a shrub.

"At the least, one can disguise himself," said Monsieur Pierre. With that he took from his valise an old threadbare blouse and a pair of trousers much the worse for wear, laid them across his knee, and began to divest himself of his frock-coat and high collar. The blouse was soon donned, but the trousers were a more difficult matter. However, by dint of perseverance the change was effected, and Monsieur Pierre, perspiring freely, stood up upon his stump.

"What do you think of it?" he asked, mopping his forehead. "But wait, there is still something."

He stooped down and, after rummaging in the valise, produced a false beard, which he fitted to his chin.

I solemnly assured him he was quite unrecognisable. He continued, breathless :

"The blouse is my father's, also the trousers. The beard was worn by my mother once at the carnival. Grâce à Dieu, it has kept well. No one will know me, n'est-ce pas, monsieur? No one will be able to say that Pierre Tripet is gone to consult a sorcerer. Not even the sorcerer himself will guess it, eh, monsieur?"

The discarded trousers and frock-coat having been carefully folded and packed in the valise, Monsieur Pierre was about to return to the road when he remembered something.

"Tiens! The valise! We must hide it. It is not the baggage of a peasant. Besides, there are in it things marked with my name. My umbrella with the silver handle must be hidden too."

He placed them in a hollow of the ground, and heaped pine-needles over them.

Regaining the road at length, we walked in silence for a minute. Then he stopped.

"It is best that you return," he said. "They have seen us start together, and will divine something extraordinary, seeing monsieur with a different companion and a stranger. Au revoir!"

Beside the road, at the point where we stood, was a pine-tree in whose trunk some devout person had scooped a hollow of about a foot square. A tiny pane of glass filled the opening, through which a doll-like image of the Blessed Virgin was seen, surrounded by artificial flowers. A votive offering of forget-me-nots, now brown, had been pinned to the trunk below. To my surprise Monsieur Pierre saluted this primitive shrine with a wave of his hat.

"I place myself under thy protection, madame," he murmured; then with a sheepish air explained to me: "When one has to deal with the devil one must ally oneself with the supernatural powers. I hope to return to-morrow evening. Au revoir!"

Then I knew that the surface scepticism of Monsieur Pierre was but a cloak for the grossest superstition; that he had an unreasoning dread of his interview with the sorcerer, even greater than his wholesome fear of being laughed at.

On my return to the village I found Samuel seated on a bench under one of the acacias in the square, refreshing himself with wine, preparatory to the slaughter of a bullock.

"Eh bien, our amiable Pierre has started on his journey to the sorcerer's house," he observed, with

a wink. "Dame! he will amuse himself down there."

I replied that the Parisian had been called by business to St Théodule, but that he would return probably to-morrow evening.

Samuel was incredulous. "Ah, I understand!" he said. "You are in the plot. You say that he will return to-morrow evening? I bet you that he will return after dark and on foot. A troubled conscience goes not in a carriage, neither loves it the light of day. You will see, monsieur, he will rather encounter ghosts than the eyes of the village. Anyhow, the barometer promises fine weather for his walk."

That evening, to my astonishment, I received a visit from the parish priest. My landlady ushered him into the guest-room with much ceremony, and closed the door upon us.

"Monsieur is surprised to see a visitor at this hour?" he said, shaking hands. "In fact it is rather late. But I come for information. Will you kindly tell me what you know concerning Pierre Tripet?"

In spite of my promise to Monsieur Pierre, I told the whole story. Something in the old priest's manner forbade evasion. I told it, as I thought, amusingly; but the curé did not smile.

"Ah, monsieur!" he sighed when I had finished, "if you knew the pains I have taken these thirty years to eradicate such evil superstitions!

"You advised for the best, no doubt, according to your ideas. But—you will pardon me—you do not understand our peasants. I fear that, by your too great sympathy with their follies, you have confirmed them in much that is evil. An educated man has a

duty to perform in trying to raise the minds of his less fortunate brethren. You do not know perhaps that the result of this journey will be discord and ill-feeling in the village. Hippolyte will lay the blame of his imaginary evil at the door of some innocent person, and many will be found to side with him. Rancour against this supposed enemy will disturb his end. I shall go to him to-morrow to see what my remonstrances and prayers can do. But, monsieur, with most innocent intentions, you have done me and my parish a bad turn."

"You must not distress yourself too much," he added, cutting short my answer. "It is I who am the more culpable, in that I have not kept closer watch over my people."

So saying, he picked up his hat with its priestly cord and tassel, and prepared to leave. I went with him as far as the door of the hotel, and stood looking after him as he crossed the square. Some men in front of the Café de l'Union raised their hats as he passed; and above their murmur of salutation came the voice of Samuel: "The barometer holds itself firm, Monsieur le Curé. We have nothing to fear for the hay this year."

The next evening, sitting at a window overlooking the square, I was aware of an unwonted bustle of excitement. It was dusk, the hour when Bonthex is usually at its quietest. Men stood in little groups about the doors of the houses, and the two cafés in sight were doing a roaring trade. A man, in whom I recognised the butcher, passed from group to group, seeming to give instructions. His presence was

always the signal for a burst of laughter. Suddenly he raised his hand. An unearthly gibbering arose, culminating in a yell, something between the howl of the wind on a stormy night and the death-shriek of a horse. Samuel nodded his head approvingly, and the groups began to mingle together, and move off down the road. Having watched them depart, the butcher returned to the Café de l'Union to refresh.

I was thinking of going across to inquire of the matter when my landlady burst into the room, exclaiming: "Monsieur, it is shameful! And to think that one's husband—a married man and the father of a family—takes his part in such bad games! It is enough to drive the poor boy mad. Heard one ever the like? And Monsieur Samuel, too, who is almost an old man, to organise such devilry! All the village will be demoralised, and Monsieur le Curé will certainly excommunicate us all. Our young men are easily excited, and it is possible that what began as a game will end in murder, if the poor young man gets angry and resists, although my husband says they will not touch him. Mon Dieu! it is too much!"

"Is it Monsieur Pierre?" I asked.

"Have I not told you? It seems that, in the café the other evening, he was saying that he had no fear of ghosts returning from the other world, because he did not believe that there was any other world from which to return. That was only a boast, monsieur; but what chiefly annoyed Monsieur Samuel and others was, that with such ideas he dared to call himself a Liberal. They wish to give him a lesson. A large number of young men of the village

—all of them Liberals—will hide themselves in the forest on either side of the road. When he passes, they are to make that noise you heard. Shadow and moonlight are enough in themselves to terrify a poor atheist who walks alone. He will go mad, or die of fright.”

I offered to meet Monsieur Pierre and warn him, but she shook her head.

“Mon Dieu! thêy would kill you! When our young men are excited, it fares ill with him who interferes in their game. Stay here, I command you!”

My landlady then sank into a chair and remained silent for a long while, with hands covering her eyes. All at once she started to her feet and gained the window, crying :

“Someone arrives!”

There was a sound of feet stumbling hurriedly over the cobbles, and in at the door of the hotel. Then the door of the room burst open, and a man staggered in.

“Mon Dieu!” screamed my landlady. “It is a stranger! They have driven a stranger mad with their bad tricks! There will be a procès, the whole commune will be fined.”

The man, his face grey with terror, reeled and clutched at the table to prevent himself from falling. “A glass of cognac!” he panted, staring at us with dull eyes.

The landlady, in her agitation, poured out a wine-glassful of the spirit, and spilt half of it in the carriage from side-board to table. The man gulped it down, shivered, and sank back upon the sofa.

“Ah, these young men of ours! It is too dread-

ful! To play their tricks upon a stranger—the father of a family too, who wears a beard!”

“Hush, madame! It is Monsieur Pierre!” I explained in a whisper. “He disguised himself like that at starting.”

I supported the poor fellow to his room, and helped him to undress. My landlady followed with a basin of hot soup. He awoke in the morning but little the worse for his fright. I went early to the forest and brought back his valise and umbrella, so that he was able to appear before the village just as usual.

I learnt next day that the conspirators had taken him for a peasant on account of his disguise, and had frightened him to keep their hands in. They returned to the village in the small hours of the morning, shamefaced and dejected at the miscarriage of their plot. Many of them suffered from bad colds in the head for the next few days. They would never have known of their unwitting success but for the loose tongue of my landlady's husband—a gentleman whom I would call my landlord had he ever appeared to me in that light. He related the story of Monsieur Pierre's home-coming at the Café de la Poste, and the young men concerned in the affair have bragged of it ever since.

When I asked my fellow-lodger how he had fared with the sorcerer, he flushed and produced a little parcel from his pocket.

“It is that which is going to cure my father—according to the old charlatan,” he said, with the shadow of a smile. “At least he said so. It will kill the enemy. But, monsieur, it contains only common

herbs plucked at midnight. However, as you said, one must humour a dying man."

He was absent from the hotel all that day and the night following. When he did return in the sunshine of an early morning, his face was haggard from a sleepless night.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, as he sat down with me to breakfast, "I would not pass another night like this for all the money one can gain at Paris. According to the sorcerer's directions we waited until midnight, and then my mother lighted the fire, having first shut all the doors and windows. We undid the parcel, and scattered the herbs upon the fire. There had been the sound of thunder in the distance for some minutes. Just then the rain began. Soon it became a deluge—the wind drove the smoke from the chimney back into the room. We were all but stifled, yet we dared not open door or window, because of what the sorcerer had said. Drops of rain and soot came down the chimney, so that the fire was extinguished before all the herbs were burnt. Then I opened the window. My father had been almost killed by the smoke. When he heard that some of the herbs remained, he was furious. He said that the devil had sent the storm to help his servant, who would have been killed if the herbs had been burnt. As it is, he believes that the enemy has only been made lame or blind. It sounds stupid now that I relate it to you in a comfortable room by daylight; but I assure you it made me shudder at night, in the old chalet, lighted only by the fire, amid the noise of wind and rain and thunder."

"But that is not all, monsieur," he pursued in a

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lower tone. "I have learnt that Julie, the wife of the butcher, fell downstairs last night and broke her leg. My father was saying that the herbs consumed were not enough to kill—that they would only blind or lame the enemy. It is curious."

Remembering my interview with the curé, I advised him to keep this accident to Madame Julie a secret from his father. It was not good that the old man should feel hatred against anyone now that he was dying.

Monsieur Pierre shrugged his shoulders.

"It is impossible," he replied. "My father must have heard of it by now. People from the village pass our chalet every morning. Besides, monsieur, can one be sure that it is an accident?"

After breakfast, he went back to his father's house, and I saw no more of him for several days.

On a grey misty afternoon, some four days later, as I was sitting in the guest-room of the hotel, the tinkle of a bell made itself heard—at first distant and fitful, growing louder and more distinct as it drew nearer. Looking out, I saw the curé cross the square in surplice and biretta, his white head bowed in reverence for that which he carried veiled in white. Before him walked a little boy swinging a bell.

"Ah, it is to the poor Hippolyte that one brings the good God," exclaimed my landlady at my elbow. "It is the end of us all, monsieur. But Hippolyte is fortunate to have a rich son who can afford to pay for all the Masses needed."

It was not until the day after the funeral that I had the opportunity of offering my condolences to Monsieur Pierre. He was standing in the square in

familiar conversation with a young wood-cutter from a chalet high up in the forest. Had not my friend addressed me, I should hardly have recognised him, so different was his rustic suit of mourning from the frock-coat and light trousers I remembered. He received my rather lame assurance of sympathy with more emotion than I had expected.

"Ah, monsieur! death is a dreadful thing! And to think that one cannot escape it! I am not superstitious—we others of the great world, we know what all that is worth—but it makes me cold to think of it. Besides, there are things one does not understand. It seems my father did not die a natural death. It is right that people who work evil upon others should be punished, is it not?"

At that moment a girl crossed the "place," leading a calf by a rope. The animal struggled and pulled back, declining to pass us. She was a well-made girl of seventeen, with a peasant's grace of freedom in every limb. Encountering the earnest gaze of Monsieur Pierre, she seemed abashed. The wood-cutter, who had been standing awkwardly apart during my talk with Pierre, glad of something to do, gave the calf a kick with his hob-nailed boot. The creature set off at a gallop, dragging its mistress. Monsieur Pierre gazed after her.

"Who is she, Ignace?" he inquired of the wood-cutter.

"Rose, the daughter of the butcher. She is of the house of the enemy. Since you seem taken with her, one can punish her instead of the other, if you wish."

To do Pierre justice, he seemed greatly shocked at

this proposal. He abused the wood-cutter roundly, and bade him never speak like that again. Monsieur l'Anglais, hearing such talk, would suppose that the people of Bonthex were still savages!

"Ah, that is all fine and good," muttered the wood-cutter, with a hangdog grin. "But one must strike a blow in revenge. Hippolyte was a good master to me, and I will pay the enemy out if I have to do it alone."

Passing Samuel's house that afternoon, I took occasion to advise him not to let his daughter wander far from home. He thanked me, but laughed much at my forebodings. The next morning all Bonthex rang with the tidings of a great misfortune in the butcher's house. Samuel was beside himself. He had been seen to weep. In short, a ruffian had come in the night and stolen the barometer.

That the theft had not been committed for the sake of gain was evident, for the instrument was found, battered beyond recognition, in the dry bed of a torrent.

Threats of vengeance mingled strangely with the business talk of shop and slaughter-house. Although capital punishment is in no case sanctioned by the laws of the Canton Valais, nothing less than decapitation would satisfy the butcher in the flush of wrath. He hinted that he knew the wretch who had thus cruelly wronged him. The words "Paris" and "airs of a grand seigneur" left no doubt in the minds of his hearers as to the man suspected.

It was just when, his anger at its height, he was standing at his shop door, breathing fire, and threatening with appropriate gestures to slaughter the

offender as he would an ox, that Monsieur Pierre came up the road, escorting the blushing Rose.

Samuel—I have the story from his own mouth—was forced to lean against the doorpost for support; the neighbours fell back, gaping, and Monsieur Pierre approached the butcher, hat in hand. He asked for the favour of a few minutes' conversation in private. Without speaking, Samuel led the way into the shop.

“Monsieur, I desire your permission to pay my addresses to your charming daughter.”

The butcher removed his hat the better to scratch his close-cropped head and, staring at a knot in the wooden floor, ejaculated:

“Dame!”

“I am in a position to marry,” the suitor continued, “as soon as the time of mourning for my father has expired. I have fifty thousand francs placed to advantage, and my three restaurants at Paris——”

Samuel shook his head slowly, echoing the word “Paris” with evident distaste.

“And my three restaurants at Paris which, your consent and that of mademoiselle obtained, I shall at once sell. I have the idea to build a great hotel on the slope up there above the forest. Monsieur l'Anglais would recommend it to his friends, and one could advertise in the papers. A great hotel demands much meat. We could be partners.”

“Enough said, Pierre!” cried Samuel, fairly conquered. “You have my consent.” He rubbed his eyes to make sure that he was not dreaming, then smote Pierre on the back.

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“I caused a trick to be played on you once,” he said. “You or your family—it is the same thing—lamed my wife and destroyed my barometer. And now you will marry my daughter. We are quits, monsieur!”

MONSIEUR LE PRÉSIDENT

IN private life his name was François Tripet, but, at the time of which I write, he was always known in Bonthex as "Monsieur le Président." Men who would have stopped and had a friendly chat with mere François Tripet, raised their hats and stood aside for Monsieur le Président. Little children going to school would greet him with a timid "Bon jour," trembling the while, they knew not why. When he entered one of the seven cafés of the place (which was not seldom), the men rose and took off their hats. He was the autocrat of Bonthex.

Yet, to the eyes of a mere Englishman, there was nothing in Monsieur le Président's outward appearance to distinguish him from other men. He was a broad-shouldered, heavy fellow, good natured, and inclined to be sleepy. On week-days he wore an old blouse—which had once been blue—a battered straw hat with a very broad brim, trousers of a faded mud colour, and clumsy hob-nailed boots. For Sundays, funerals, and feast-days, he had a black suit of good wearing material, and a black felt hat, with crown depressed into a kind of crater. But this was the costume of all the other men of the place, except Samuel the butcher, who wore a pink blouse when on duty, and the gendarme and the curé, who had their uniforms.

He was not an old man—just old enough to have a grown-up daughter and no more—and his close-cropped head showed no tinge of grey. What his presidential duties were I could never find out.

People spoke with hushed voices of a communal council, where councillors met together for the public good. My landlady once had the goodness to point out to me two of the councillors from the window of the hotel. One was carrying a load of wood, and the other was watching him do it. Both were smoking curved wooden pipes with metal lids to keep the weather from their tobacco, and they nodded to each other, neither speaking or taking the pipe from his mouth.

I was glad to learn that the council did some work in the person of at least one of its members, but what was the president's task? I put the question to my landlady, and she told me that Monsieur le Président had many affairs—a reply which set me wondering how he managed to spend so much of his time in the cafés, and why he was always half asleep when I met him.

One afternoon, when walking, or rather scrambling, for the path was steep, in the pine forests behind the village, I heard the sound of chopping hard by, and came upon Monsieur le Président. He was seated upon a felled tree from which the bark had been stripped, and his eyes were closed. One hand held a stumpy lead pencil, the other a very greasy notebook. At a little distance, two men with axes were chopping away at a giant pine. Thinking that Monsieur le Président was taking a nap, I deemed it advisable to retire without disturbing him, but, just

as I was stepping away noiselessly over the mossy ground, he opened his eyes with a yawn.

I stopped and wished him "Good-day." He looked at me sleepily for some seconds, and then held out his hand.

"Bon jour, monsieur," he said, with a certain air of condescension. "You are making a walk."

I assented, and he seemed surprised at his own discernment.

"Do you please yourself at Bonthex?" he asked, re-opening his eyes after a drowsy interval.

"I am charmed with the place," I said. "It is so pretty and so quiet."

"Ah!" he said. "But it is a pity that we have not yet the electric light in the village."

I had never dreamt of such a luxury in Bonthex, and I said as much.

"That will come," he yawned, "that will come. Next year we hope to have a surplus, and then we shall instal the electric light in the village. There is motive power enough—torrents on all sides. Next year we shall instal the electric light, and the year after that we shall think about the telephone."

"But where will the money come from?" I asked in amazement.

"The communal revenue is large, and next year we hope to have a surplus," he explained, with a wave of his hand in the direction of the woodcutters.

I understood from the gesture that the forests were a source of revenue.

"You have no forests in England?" he murmured, closing his eyes once more.

"Oh, yes, we have forests!" I replied, thinking of Epping.

"Vraiment!" he murmured very drowsily. "Then why do the English come to see our forests when they have them at home? But perhaps you have no mountains."

I was thinking of describing North Wales to my friend, when a loud crash nearly deafened me. The ground shook under my feet, and the wood-cutters raised a shout of triumph. The tree had fallen.

Monsieur le Président opened his eyes, looked at me, then at the tree, then at his pencil, and then at his notebook.

"Pardon, monsieur! You smoke?" he said, rising and fumbling under his blouse. "Permit me to offer you a cigar."

Upon my taking one he showed a strong tendency to relapse into his former drowsy state, but happening to prick himself with the lead pencil, he thought better of it, and began to stroll leisurely towards the tree.

"Pardon, monsieur!" he said, turning with an air of importance when he had made a few steps. "It is necessary to excuse me! I am here to supervise the cutting of the trees of the commune."

With that he drew from his pocket a long piece of tape, marked off in metre lengths, and resumed his way.

Having watched him measure the tree, I walked down the steep path back to the hotel, much edified by the knowledge I had that day obtained of Monsieur Tripet's presidential duties. But I could not help wondering why everybody should treat him with such deference. Like every other Swiss com-

mune, Bonthex is a little republic in itself, combining with other village republics to form the larger republic called the canton, which, in its turn, combines with other cantons to form the Swiss confederation.

Not two people in the whole village knew who was at that time president of the confederation, and not four could give me the name of the president of the cantonal council. Evidently these worthy gentlemen were not much thought of. Then why, in the name of goodness, should the communal president be treated with such high respect?

I consulted Samuel the butcher upon the subject one evening, when we chanced to be together in one of the seven cafés of the place. Samuel being rather a friend of mine, I felt that I could speak my mind freely.

"Why," I asked, "do you all treat Monsieur Tripet as if he were a despot with power of life and death over his subjects, instead of the president of an enlightened and republican commune?"

Samuel took his pipe out of his mouth and stared at me in amazement.

"You ask me why?"

I nodded.

"Monsieur le Président is rich!" he said.

"Indeed!"

"Oui, monsieur! and learned!"

It was the first I had heard of it.

"Oui, monsieur, he is a good president. And then—nobody else would be it!"

"Be what?"

"Be president, b'en sûr! The work is too hard for

most people, but Monsieur le Président is as energetic as—as——. He paused, looking round for a simile. "As an elephant!" he cried triumphantly, catching sight of an advertisement of somebody's chocolate, in which that animal played a leading part. "He is as energetic as an elephant! Nobody else would be president but he! Other sort of work one can leave to one's wife, but the president must do his own. If there is field-work to be done one can send for his wife, and stop at home at his ease and smoke his pipe. It's the same for pig-killing. When there's a pig to kill I say to Julie, 'Go, kill the pig!' and it is done. The same for sheep. Unhappily she is not strong enough for the oxen and calves." He sighed and veiled his modest face in a cloud of tobacco smoke. "But it is different with him," he continued with a jerk of his thumb in the direction of Monsieur Tripet's chalet. "Monsieur le Président is a wonderful man. Even when he was simple 'monsieur' he used to keep his wife at home and do all the outdoor work himself. Dame! he used to treat her more like a vase of porcelain than a woman. So, when the old president died, we elected him to the place, seeing how energetic he was. He wished at first to refuse, because, he said, he had work enough of his own to do without any public business. But we arranged all that. Ah, oui! we arranged all that!"

"And how?" I asked, deeply interested.

"Well, we made an arrangement that the commune should take charge of his lands, while he should occupy himself entirely with the affairs of the commune. It was a good bargain."

"For him—yes! But for you?"

"Better for us than for him, monsieur. He is obliged to do his work himself, while the women do our work and his field-work as well."

"But is that fair to the women?" I asked.

"Dame! there are more women than men in the village. It is right that they should do the greater share of the work."

"And the president's wife?"

"She is dead."

Samuel sighed, and blew a cloud of smoke up to the grimy ceiling.

"Poor Monsieur le Président! He has never been the same man since. But he is energetic—energetic as an elephant! And he has a daughter."

It was not long before I found out the true secret of Monsieur Tripet's influence with the younger and more turbulent members of the community. He had a daughter—and his daughter was beautiful.

She was just seventeen when I first knew her. Tall and rather broadly built, she seemed a woman already. And, indeed, she had kept house for Monsieur le Président for three years past in a truly womanly manner. Entirely without affectation, at once stately and graceful, with her thick coils of golden-brown hair, her strong oval face, her hazel eyes—half pensive, half roguish—her clear healthy complexion, rather enhanced than spoilt by sunburn, no wonder she was the idol of every man, boy, and hobbledehoy in Bonthex.

A sculptor would have looked upon her figure as an inspiration, and a mere stone-mason, seeing her walk across the little "place," would have turned

sculptor on the spot. Her beauty was the apotheosis of the peasant type. I could never imagine her in a ball-room. A Parisian costume would have made her look ridiculous, but in her peasant's dress, amid her village surroundings, she was perfect.

On Sunday mornings, when she walked home from Mass by her father's side, it was almost laughable to see how the youth of the village vied with each other in attentions. Some presented nosegays; the gifts of others took the more prosaic form of boxes of chocolate or bonbons. Even the old curé would pause in his hurried flight from church to dinner, to pat her on the cheek in a fatherly way. Other girls less favoured by nature, cast envious glances in her direction, but without spite, for they had grown up in the knowledge of her superiority. The walk from church was nothing but a triumphal procession. The least puddle in the roadway was excuse enough for the proffer of an arm, or rather of twenty arms. And, when at length the president's chalet was reached, all the youths who had taken part in the little cortège came up one by one, to shake hands. Great burly fellows trembled and blushed as they touched her, and it was not without relief that they turned to make their adieux to Monsieur le Président. As for her father, he adored the ground she trod on. As Samuel said of her mother, "he treated her more like a vase of porcelain than a woman." He was quite wide awake only when with her.

I could not help wondering whom she would marry. There was nobody in Bonthex worthy of her, of that I was quite sure. In my heart of hearts I was convinced that there was but one person in the

world truly worthy of her, and that person was myself. But I had had a similar conviction before with reference to other reigning beauties, who, alas, had failed to see things in the same light. Besides, being a gentleman of position, I could not, of course, think seriously of a peasant girl, however comely. So I put the thought entirely out of my head, and took the earliest opportunity of calling upon Monsieur le Président.

My first visit was made in the evening, immediately after supper—the fashionable hour for paying calls at Bonthex if the caller wishes to find his friend at home. I found Monsieur le Président seated on a bench under the apple tree at the back of his *châlet*, with his daughter knitting by his side. It was already dusk, and the whiteness of the snow-clad peaks above seemed to draw all the light from the valley to itself.

Monsieur le Président rose to meet me. “You are welcome,” he said. “Be seated, I pray. Run to the house, Blanche, and bring a chair for monsieur. This bench is not comfortable enough.”

I begged that mademoiselle would do nothing of the kind, the bench being all that I could wish. Room was made for me between father and daughter, and the latter went on with her knitting. She must have knitted by instinct, for it was far too dark to see the stitches.

“Do you please yourself at Bonthex, monsieur?” inquired her father. He always asked me the same question when we met.

“Oh, yes, very well!” I replied. “I like quiet places.”

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"Ah, yes! it is quiet! One must confess it! But when we have installed the electric light and the telephone, it will be different. Then someone will build a big hotel on the Alp there above the forest, and foreigners will come and spend money."

"I should go somewhere else then," I said, laughing, "I do not like big hotels."

"Mais, comment? Monsieur does not like big hotels," he exclaimed. "Is it possible? Dost hear that, Blanche?"

Blanche looked at me in amazement. Her eyes certainly were magnificent, even in the dark.

"Can one be a foreigner and not love the great hotels?" she said, wonderingly. "But monsieur teases us, no doubt."

"I came here for peace and quiet," I explained, "and I have found both. But the hotel would destroy all that, and would make of Bonthex a place like another."

"But, monsieur, it was on your account that my father first thought of having a hotel here."

"On my account?"

"Mais oui, monsieur, we have had foreigners here before, but only for a day or two, and then they have gone away. But you—you have stayed so long that my father feels ashamed that there is nothing more commodious than a little inn in the village."

"Oui, monsieur," her father chimed in, "and when we shall have installed the electric light and telephone you can tell your friends about Bonthex, and they can come and spend money."

I was too astonished to make any reply.

"At present, Blanche," said Monsieur le Président, peering at his watch, "it is time for thee to go to bed. Thou hast the butter to make to-morrow morning."

She shook hands with me, kissed her father, and disappeared within the house.

"Let us go to the café, monsieur, and drink a good glass together," said Monsieur le Président, rising. "Ah, it will be different when we have installed the electric light and the telephone. Pardon, monsieur, you will smoke a cigar?"

After that I used frequently to spend my evenings with Monsieur Tripet, either at his chalet or at one of the cafés. And I thought of Mademoiselle Blanche more than was good for me.

So the time wore on, until one morning I received a letter calling me back to England upon urgent business. Having packed my belongings, I walked down the village to bid farewell to Monsieur le Président. I found him seated in his little bureau, poring over certain documents, while Blanche, leaning over his shoulder, expounded their contents to him. Was this the learned man of whom Samuel had spoken?

"I have come to make my adieux, Monsieur le Président," I said.

"You are going to leave us?" he asked, "and so suddenly?"

I explained that I was called away on business.

"Ah, business," he exclaimed. "It is business before all things. I know something about that." He glanced somewhat ruefully at his desk strewn with papers.

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"You have much to do?" I asked. It was the first time I had seen him at work, and I felt interested.

"Oui, monsieur, I have enough. The cantonal authorities have just sent me a notice—and such a notice! There are words in it as long as my little finger. I should never be able to read it without the help of my little Blanche here. I can read a word of two syllables or even three, but when it comes to four or five—*Mon Dieu!* it is nonsense to me."

"Au revoir, Monsieur Tripet," I said, shaking his hand. "I hope that we shall meet again one of these fine days."

"You must come back for Blanche's wedding," he said, returning the pressure.

"Is she engaged then?" I asked, startled.

"No, no! not yet!" said Monsieur Tripet. "She has not yet chosen, and I have not yet thought enough about it. I fear she will not be able to marry in Bonthex. It is the custom here for men to make slaves of their wives, and I would not have my darling do the work of a horse at any man's bidding. I fear she will have to seek her husband elsewhere. But she will marry, she will marry."

I remarked that it would be her own fault if she did not, and therewith took my leave. On my way back to the inn I met Samuel in his pink blouse, dragging a sturdy goat to the slaughter.

"Ah," said he, "you come from chez Monsieur le Président—the good man. But it will be a good thing for the village when Mademoiselle Blanche is married. All the young men are quarrelling about her, but I should not wish a son of mine to marry

her. She has been too much petted and pampered at home. A poor man's wife must work."

"While her husband smokes his pipe," I suggested. "But do you think she will be married soon? She is so young."

"Who can tell? Monsieur le Président has his ideas, and he thinks. Dame! what a head he has! Au revoir, monsieur. Bon voyage et bon retour."

The last words were spoken under difficulties, as the goat made sudden frantic plunges, seeming likely to escape.

As the coach rattled down the zigzag road among the pine-woods, affording now a view of the wide Rhone valley far below, now a glimpse of the village I was leaving, its bright green pastures contrasting strangely with the sombre hues of the forest and the blue-grey of the rocky heights above, I vowed in my heart that I would return to Bonthex in three months' time at the latest. I longed to see the place in winter, when it is shut off from the rest of the world, and the snow is often six feet deep round the chalets. How cosy it would be to spend a long evening in the president's kitchen-parlour, with a wood fire crackling and sputtering in the great stone stove, and Mademoiselle Blanche knitting sedately in her low chair by her father's side.

But it was not to be. Two years passed, and I had all but forgotten Monsieur le Président and his lovely daughter, when, happening to be in that part of Switzerland, I again climbed the path through the pine-forest and walked up the village street. It was

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a bright summer day, and the grasshoppers were chirping shrilly amid the upland pastures.

The place was the same as ever: the old wooden chalets, tanned a rich brown by exposure to the weather; the church with its quaint gilded spire, the huge wooden crucifix at the churchyard gate, the little shrine by the post-office. But in the post-office itself I noticed a change. A new word had been added to the announcement above the door:—

“BUREAU DES POSTES ET TELEGRAPHES
DE
BONTHEX.
TELEPHONE.”

Also, jutting out from a corner of the wooden wall of a house opposite, was a metal shade in shape like a Chinaman's hat, from which a small glass globe depended. The electric light was installed at last.

I found the little inn unchanged as to the outside, save that the old sign-board, with its grotesque portrait of William Tell, had been removed, and a board placed over the door, with the inscription:—

“HÔTEL PENSION DE BONTHEX.”

But within all was changed. The wooden walls of the staircase and passages had been planed down and painted to represent marble. There was electric light in all the rooms, which were numbered one, two, three, and so forth, “pour ne pas se tromper,” as mine hostess told me with great glee. Only the person of the landlady had undergone no change, and when, having unpacked my portmanteau, I went to

have a chat with her in the kitchen, I was relieved to find that sanctum as untidy, as smoky, and as redolent of garlic as formerly.

"Oui, monsieur, Bonthex is changed," she said, in reply to a remark of mine. "We have made some progress since you have been away."

"Monsieur le Président, is he always well?" I inquired. "And Mademoiselle Blanche, is she yet married?"

The good lady held her apron to her eyes.

"Ah, monsieur, then you have not heard? She is dead, there is already three months. You can see her grave in the cemetery, close to the great white rose tree."

"But how! of what did she die?" I asked, shocked at the news. "She was so robust, so healthy."

"Ah, monsieur, it was not of any malady that she died. The good God and the Holy Virgin have more ways than one of taking folk to themselves. Poor Blanche was climbing in the mountains, seeking the gentians, when a great stone fell and struck her here" (my landlady put her hand to the crown of her head), "and she died. It was very sad. Madame Charraz, of the post, and I, we prepared her for the burial. Never have I seen a more beautiful corpse. She looked like an angel asleep. All the world was at the funeral."

"And Monsieur le Président?" I asked.

"Ah, the poor good man! After the funeral he shut himself up in his house for two whole days, and no one saw him; only Monsieur le Curé was admitted. And at the end of that time he came out and went about his affairs the same as usual, except that his

hair is quite grey. And he has never spoken of Blanche but once, when he told Samuel that his daughter had gone where she would never have to be the slave of any man. That was a funny thing to say, was it not, monsieur? Any other man would have regretted that she had not lived to make him a grandfather. But Monsieur le Président has his ideas."

There were four people at supper besides myself, two English girls of the emancipated self-assertive type, who were on a walking tour, a French artist, and a Swiss commercial traveller.

The two girls were loud in their praises of Bonthex. It was such a pretty place, so out of the beaten track. And the air was so delightfully invigorating. They had been strolling round the churchyard that afternoon. Had I been there? The roses were so lovely, and such quaint inscriptions on the graves. One in particular had struck them as very droll; it was on quite a new gravestone too. The younger girl had made a rough translation of it in her memorandum book. There it was. I took the note-book and read:—

In memory of
BLANCHE,

BELOVED AND ONLY DAUGHTER OF

FRANÇOIS TRIPET,

PRESIDENT OF THE COMMUNE,

WHOM THE GOOD GOD THOUGHT FIT TO

TAKE AWAY FROM HER FATHER IN THE SAME YEAR

THAT THE TELEPHONE WAS INSTALLED AT BONTHEX.

Au revoir.

THE HEAT OF THE SUN

A BIT OF HISTORY

LEYLAH the courtesan was of so fierce a temper that other women of her sort could not put up with her ; so from the outset of her career she had lived alone, at first as the guarded pet of a rich notable of Damascus, then at Beyrout as a singer and dancer, and afterwards at Cairo and Alexandria in the same capacity. A Jewess of Damascus, which is enough to say that she had native wit and vigour ; trained to charm men as carefully as hawks are trained ; she found lovers everywhere, and little wonder, in lands where women usually are of almost bestial stupidity. She was travelled and fairly educated, could recite Arabic poetry, and sing to her lute distractingly in the husky heart-broken voice which drives every son of the East to the verge of madness. Yet, despite fatigues and vigils, she preserved her freshness, thanks to a cat-like indifference to the embraces she provoked ; which indifference proceeded from a pure attachment. From some obscure instinct of race she loved, and loved only, an invalid and ugly Jew, whom she supported. Him she saw seldom and by stealth, but all her toils inferred him ; and the motive of unselfish kindness kept her young. In the towns of Egypt she had maintained this man in comfort near

her, and, now once more in Beyrout, had hired for him three rooms in the heart of the town, while she herself inhabited but one room with a balcony on the first floor of a newish red-roofed house in a back street running up towards the country.

On the night of my story she was sitting in her room at business, making talk and music for the entertainment of two visitors, a Muslim and a Christian; the one the son of a great notable of the town, the other a man of forty who had lately returned from America with five thousand pounds. It was a duel between these two which should outstay the other; but while the Christian showed politeness, even deference, in his rivalry with a professor of the dominant faith, the Muslim, with knit brows and grinding teeth, grew more and more insulting in his muttered reflections, making no attempt to hide his disgust of the other's presence.

Leylah felt furious, and could not keep from showing some displeasure in her manner towards him. She had no wish to be alone with either of them; but, having experienced both men, she preferred the Nazarene, who, besides being generous, was polite in his approaches; such politeness being grateful to a woman who detested the fatigues of passion. The Muslim was a cub of savage breed, against whom she would have shut her door had it not been for his father's high position in the city.

At length, after midnight, he pulled out a revolver and toyed with it lovingly. His opponent then withdrew, surprised, it seemed, to find the hour so late; a little comforted by Leylah's despairing shrug to him,

and the glance of contempt she levelled at the boorish victor.

No sooner was he gone than the Muslim flung himself upon the courtesan, who, hating roughness, fought with him and pushed him off. The anger in her eyes was unmistakable. Taking offence at that, he hurled reproaches at her, cursing her religion and ancestry; till, finding these of no avail, he relapsed to pleading. When he seemed tame, she let him approach once more; but at her touch, her perfumed breath, he lost his head again and became violent. He swore to pay her out for tantalising him, her born superior, who with a word could have her whipped and cast out of the city.

"Think not that I am blind," he told her, mouth to mouth. "I saw thee smiling at that base-born Nazarene—low, Jewish sow!" With a snarl he swore to kill her, slowly, with all cruelty.

Enraged as Leylah was already, his insults and the pain his grasp inflicted made her mad. She bit his wrist and forced him to let go; then, whipping out a poniard from her breast, she stabbed him again and again, hissing:

"Take that!—and that!—and that!—O son of a dog!"

The youth on his knees beside her flung up both his arms; his eyes turned up their whites, while his body, in the act of falling backwards, seemed suddenly to change its mind, and collapsed sideways. She towered over it with set teeth and blazing eyes, intent to catch the slightest sign of life and strike it out. Satisfied at last that he was dead, she turned away with a smile, and went to fetch a live coal for her

narghileh, which had gone out. Returning from the brazier, holding the bit of fire with pincers, she felt the after-chill of rage, and shivered slightly; then, sitting down beside the corpse of her admirer, regarding it thoughtfully, she carried the tube to her lips and smoked to regain composure. The murmur of the water in the bowl as the smoke passed through it made a chuckle in the room, whose air was thick with perfumes burnt and sprinkled.

Once she leant forward and with one hand drew out the dead man's cloak so as to save the blood from running on to the floor.

"Thou art a dangerous inmate," she apostrophized the dead, in thought. "Thou art the darling of thy father, and he is great among the dogs, thy co-religionists. There will be vengeance for thee, that is certain; and I would not have it fall on my poor head. I must not keep thee here much longer. I shall bear thee forth, God helping me, and leave thee at some neighbour's door. Thou art not very big, to be so fierce. I fancy I could carry thee without much trouble. God forgive me the defilement!"

Coiling the tube of the narghileh round the bowl of it, she set to work to try. But when she stooped and strained to lift the corpse, it fell back with a thud, proving too heavy. To obtain better purchase, she grasped the hip with both hands, and strove to turn the body over, heaving with all her might. A great weight struck her face and stretched her on the floor, half stunned. The dead hand!

The hand which lay so limp upon the ground had swung up like a weight of lead and hit her. She

cowered down by the body, staring wildly. The dead hand!

Her Jewish blood ran cold with superstitious horror. The corpse, she thought, had risen up against her; perhaps had set its mark upon her face indelibly. Rubbing her cheek, she fancied she could trace a clear impression of the thumb and fingers. What was to be done?

To learn the time, she pulled aside a curtain, opened the window, and looked out. She could hear a muezzin calling up the dawn, a slender trill of sound enhancing silence; then a cock crowed. In another hour mankind would stir, and she would be unable to purge her room without discovery.

Turning back from the window, she imagined—nay, could swear—the thing had moved. Paralyzed with fear, she stood and gazed at it. Moved, nay, it was still moving—floating towards her—or was her sight deranged? She could not bear its presence there a minute longer. Care for her own skin, cunning, native caution were overwhelmed by need to cleanse the place of it. Nerved by abject terror, she seized both the feet and dragged the body out on to the balcony. She heard a clip of slippers on the cobblestones, someone was moving in the street beneath; but determination to be rid of her ghastly inmate was stronger than the fear of detection. Calling on God for strength, she caught the corpse around the waist and, lifting, leaned it against the railing of the balcony; then picking up the feet, she tipped it over. It fell with little noise. She wished it might have fallen on the head of the owner of the talking slippers. Then, startled by a cry: "Ya

Muslimîn — a Muslim — murdered — dead!" she stepped indoors with haste and shut the window.

The dead hand, when it struck her, must have numbed her brain, for ever since the blow she had been acting madly; nor could she now think connectedly and devise a plan of escape, though her mind was set to do so. She sat and rocked herself and laughed and wept by turns, while conscious of the danger closing in.

At length she realised the need to fly at once, unless she desired to be killed like a rat in that room. Having stowed her bag of money in her bosom, she threw a coarse cloak over her tinselled gauze, a shawl over her head, and stole out down the stairs. At the house door she paused and listened, hearing angry voices :

"From that balcony he was flung." "A harlot dwells there." "Let us hale her forth!"

Then, with as little noise as could be, she slipped out, and was gliding off by the wall, when the group of men around the body saw her, for it now grew light.

"Stop!" they cried, running after her; and she obeyed them, praying to her Maker for protection, shrinking close to the wall.

"Murderess!" "Daughter of a dog!" "Abandoned harlot!" "Stinking Jewess!" "Thou shalt die for this." "Kill her now at once, a dog's death, for she has slain a true believer!" Four or five pairs of hands had hold of her, dragging this way and that. The shawl was plucked from her head, the cloak from her shoulders; she shivered in her robe of tinselled gauze, which showed the limbs beneath it as in mist.

A red flower in her hair seemed laughing at her tears, her death-like pallor.

"I slew him not!" she shrieked. "Another slew him, and I grew frightened of the corpse and cast it out. By Allah, I am most innocent!"

"Swear by thy father's bones!"

"I swear by them. Listen, O my masters, O generous men, and I will tell you the true story. Two men courted me, a Muslim and a Nazarene; they were rivals. Last night they quarrelled in my presence. Allah knows how I strove to separate them! But one struck me on the cheek here—you may see the mark—and when I recovered from the blow, the Muslim lay dead at my feet; his foe had fled."

"The name of his foe, the Nazarene? Quick, this minute, or we strike thee dead!"

"Shukri Suleymân, surnamed El Amerikâni."

"His dwelling?"

"At El Mazra'eh."

A man who, disturbed by the din, had come to a lower window of the house, here cried assuringly:

"It is true, Shukri was here last night; he and the Muslim also, for I saw them on the stairs."

"Swear by thy wretched life that this is true."

"By God, I swear it!" answered Leylah, weeping bitterly.

"Had we not best detain her till the full inquiry?"

"No, let her go, poor thing. There will be no inquiry. This is not a question for the câdi. This is all men's business—a religious matter. We have too long endured the insolence of these accursed Nazarenes."

Resuming her cloak and shawl in haste, with praise to God, Leylah glided off down the street and made haste to hide herself in the populous heart of the city.

Down in the maze of dim and dirty markets, over-arched and narrow, the breath of daybreak roused the stench of festering offal. Threading tunnel after tunnel, she at last turned in at a squalid entry and knocked at a door which did not fit its doorway. Upon the lintel was a red device—the conventional presentment of a hand—with which the poorer sort of Hebrews protect their dwellings from the evil eye.

The door was opened by a lanky, shambling Jew just roused from sleep. Two locks of hair like ram's horns framed a face of that excessive, deathlike pallor, which, with the lack of courage, makes the Arabs name the Jews "sons of a dead woman." The face was sheep-like, with pale blinking eyes. A long and very dirty sort of dressing-gown clung like a shroud to the attenuated frame. Coughing painfully, with hand against his mouth, this youth inquired :

"What brings thee, O my dear?"

"A great misfortune, Eleazar. I have killed a great one of the hogs, the Gentiles, and must hide here till the cry is past."

"Welcome, O thrice blessed; enter! Is it not thy house? I am proud to receive thee in it as a second Judith. Would to God that others of our race possessed thy bravery; then should we soon destroy the race of scorners who oppress and set at nought God's chosen people. Now I myself cannot endure the thought of killing. It makes me think of being

killed, and turns my stomach. But thou art heroic ; nothing earthly daunts thee. Now sit down on that cushion there and tell me how it happened."

His speech concluded in a fit of coughing.

"Thy cough is worse this morning," exclaimed Leylah, losing sight of her own worries. "How careless to expose thy throat like that. Wrap something round it! I will buy thee a warm shawl. In the meanwhile take this one."

Doffing her own head-shawl, she draped it warmly round his neck and shoulders before proceeding with her story. For her the murder was no more than a vexatious accident. She had stabbed the Muslim as naturally and inevitably as a cat will scratch in certain circumstances. She spoke of it with a shade of annoyance, but indifferently, growing animated only when she came to tell of her escape.

"He, he, he!" sniggered Eleazar, exhibiting great yellow teeth and whitish gums. "That was capital—to tell them that the other Gentile did it. Thy dagger slew but one hog, but the arrows of thy wit, please God, will slay a thousand. For the Muslims will go for vengeance to El Mazra'eh. There will be a fight, a massacre. I must repair at once to the house of the father of the dead—there is certain to be a concourse round the door—and try to learn for certain what is being planned."

"Wrap thy shawl much closer then; the air is chill! And forget not to loose it when the sun's rays get full strength."

"Fear not, O angel from heaven, I shall obey thee."

Eleazar clapped a shapeless hat upon his head, and went forth, chuckling and coughing.

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In his absence, Leylah changed her evening robe of gauze for coarse clothes from a bundle which she always kept there; then she set to work to tidy the room, which lacked nothing in the way of modest comfort. Ever since she had found the youth Eleazar penniless and apparently dying in a Jewish lodging-house at Jaffa, it had been her pleasure to maintain him in a life of ease. Sometimes he worked a little at his trade, which was the fabrication of false antiquities, coins, medals, gems, and so on; but his state of health forbade continued effort, and she was glad, liking to think of him as hers entirely.

Having removed the rose from her hair and the paint from her cheeks by the time he returned, she presented the appearance of a common woman of the country, black-browed, heavy-jowled, and not exceptionally good-looking.

"Well, what hast thou learnt, O Eleazar?" she inquired. "Have they killed the Nazarene Shukri yet, or is the matter to be tried before the court?"

"I found the yard of the house filled with a great crowd shouting for vengeance. I dared not go in, nor seem to linger at the gateway; but I passed and repassed in the street, employing my eyes and ears. A man in the turban and habit of a religious doctor presently came out of the reception-room into the courtyard, and addressed the throng. Then I heard a great shout: 'Dîn Muhammad! To-morrow, at El Mazra'eh!' Beloved, there will be a mighty vengeance, a slaughter such as has not been seen for many years. Ere all is done thou wilt have slain as many of the infidels as the sword of David counted of the Philistines. For the people of El Mazra'eh are

not unwarlike like the ruck of Christians. They are turbulent, and will fight fiercely even though taken by surprise. They are sure to kill a few of their assailants. He, he, he!" Eleazar bared his teeth again in glee. "I have a friend, a Hebrew, dwelling on the outskirts of El Mazra'eh, who is such a quiet and obliging man that the Christians of that quarter make a friend of him and tell him secrets. I will go to him this evening and learn all there is to know on their side."

"Aye, do so, O my soul, for it concerns us nearly. Please God they will kill the Nazarene Shukri at first sight, without question; for he alone can certify my guilt."

The rest of the day was spent in loving converse; Leylah waiting on Eleazar hand and foot, he showing his unsightly teeth for pleasure till his face with its lovelocks resembled nothing so much as the skull of a horned sheep. Then, in the dusk, he sallied forth as he had promised, while she cleaned out the room and spread the beds for both of them. It seemed long before she heard his cough outside the door.

"Ha, ha!" he chuckled as she opened to him. "Great news, O beloved! My friend says that the Nazarenes of El Mazra'eh have been warned of the attack to-morrow. A renegade, Abdullah by name, who was of their faith and is now a Muslim, felt compassion for his former comrades and sent word to them. To-morrow is the first day of the week. The assault is planned for the third hour, when most of the inhabitants are wont to be in the church at Mass. The door of the church is very low and narrow; it was built against disturbance from with-

out ; but its structure tells both ways, obliging those within to come forth one by one and in a stooping posture. Two or three of the Muslims could thus deal with the congregation, while the rest sacked and burned the quarter. It was well planned. But now the Christians know, they will not go to Mass to-morrow. From dawn their men will line the cactus hedge before the church, which bounds the quarter in the direction of the pine-woods."

"And what of Shukri Suleymân, the alleged murderer?"

"Hallelujah, he has fled to the mountain."

"I thank the Creator. That is all I wished to know. Now thou art tired. Thy cough is worse. Wrap thyself up warmly in these coverings, and lie close to me."

Next morning, no sooner had Eleazar yawned and knuckled himself awake than he began to snigger: "He, he! it is the great day, O beloved. In mercy let us walk out towards El Mazra'eh and see the fun."

"If it would give thee pleasure, I am willing. But there may be danger ; and to walk much makes thee ill."

"For the love of Moses and of Ezra, I entreat thee, let me go and look!" Eleazar coughed and chuckled, sneezed and choked in one.

"First let us break our fast then," she replied, indulgently.

Having eaten a little, they set out together towards El Mazra'eh. Every man they saw had his face turned in that direction—this with terror, flying from it, chin on shoulder ; that with fierce eagerness, advancing hotfoot towards it.

"The slaughter has begun!" exclaimed Eleazar, quickening step, though Leylah kept imploring him to save his strength. "What news, O sheykh?" he inquired of an aged Nazarene.

"They fight, my son. Our young men fight like heroes. They have driven back El Islâm on to the plain beside the pine-woods. And there they fight, two thousand men at least, and will fight on till not one man is left alive. O, woe is me, to live to see this day!"

Carriages kept passing, filled with wealthy Nazarenes, men, women, and children, all with frightened faces, driven furiously by coachmen maddened by the repeated promise of bakhshîsh in the direction of the Lebanon frontier.

Going a long way round to avoid collision with the fighters, Leylah and her beloved approached the scene of combat from the further side, by a sandy path through the pine-woods. At length they could plainly hear the din of battle and see the struggling forms beyond the tree trunks.

"It is enough," said Leylah, pulling her companion's arm. "I fear the excitement for thee, and there might be danger."

Eleazar pleading, "Just a little nearer!" they advanced to the end of the grove.

There, on an open plain between the pine-woods and some flat-roofed houses, outposts of El Mazra'eh, the battle raged. On the skirts of the fray, men fired off guns and pistols; but in the centre it was hack and thrust with daggers, biting, wrestling chest to chest, strangling with the bare hands, trampling with the feet—an indistinguishable mass of humanity,

striving, crawling, which seemed as senseless to the two onlookers as a swarm of insects. There was no hope for anyone there in the thick of it, and yet fresh men kept rushing in on either side, as if in love with death.

"God has maddened them. Hallelujah!" cried Eleazar. "See how they haste to the slaughter, like bees when one beats upon a tin. Surely this is the battle long foretold, when the Gentiles shall annihilate one another, and so cleanse the world for the dominion of the chosen people, the coming of the Son of David! Praise be to God!"

He laughed aloud; but the excitement brought on so severe a fit of coughing that at the end of it he leaned against a tree trunk, appearing more dead than alive.

"O my dear!" cried Leylah in an agony. "This is what I feared for thee. Come away from the fighting and the folly, which will last till sunset. Take a sip from this flask; it holds good wine of Rischon. Now walk slowly; lean on me. I knew it, thou art much too weak for sight-seeing!"

A CHAMPION OF CHRISTENDOM

THERE had been a murder in a back street of Beyrout, an event of such common occurrence that those who gathered in the morning before the house of the victim discussed it in the tone of common news. The crowd were Christians, and they named a Muslim, one Muhammad, as the murderer.

A young man, fashionably clad in European clothes beneath the red tarbûsh, happening to pass that way, inquired of the matter. A noise of women screaming in the house announced the reign of death, but such a throng about the door appeared unusual. He put his question to a burly fellow in a long striped robe, who wore a dirty rag bound round his fez by way of a turban. Having ascertained by a glance that the inquirer was a co-religionist, this person spat on the causeway, then raised both hands up towards the shining sky, before replying :

“It is a poor good man, our neighbour, killed last night. He was shot in the street as he came home late—a little drunk, it may be ; none can say with certainty. Turning a corner in a narrow place, he chanced to run against a certain Muslim. The Muslim cried out ‘Pig!’ and, whipping out a revolver, fired three shots into his body. Three persons saw it done.”

The listener was by nature excitable ; and he had been brought up at the college of the Jesuits to love our holy religion single-mindedly, execrating all others as vile abominations of the prince of darkness. With tearful eyes and a trembling voice, he exclaimed :

“O Lord, can such things be? Can the heathen kill baptized people as if they were dogs, yet go unpunished? Surely punishment must follow on the slayer. If he has fled, he will be caught directly, seeing there is nowhere to flee to save our Lebanon, where the majority are Christian, praise to Allah! There is a law, a court of some kind, in the wilâyet ; and he will be punished, since thou sayest there are witnesses.”

The man in the striped robe laughed.

“It is well seen thou art of the mountain,” he rejoined, sneeringly. “Here, in the wilâyet, there is no justice for the likes of us. The murderer has not fled ; why should he? He has nought to fear. He opened his shop this morning, doubtless, and sits there as usual. Moreover, for our three truthful witnesses he would produce a hundred liars, who would swear that the poor, dead, righteous man attacked him first with violence. Would to Allah that we dwelt within the bounds of Lebanon! Only there is no money to be earned yonder. When the High Government, pushed by the Franks, gave the Mountain its liberties, it took care to destroy every hope of prosperity for the inhabitants by walling their freedom in with a prohibitive tariff. Poor men must eat, so we come into the city here, and get maltreated.”

“O Virgin Immaculate! O Allah!” cried the

youth in a frenzy. "Why—why not rise and slay them, every one, or die in the attempt? Is there not among you one great soul, one hero to take vengeance for Christ's people? Behold, I am a youth, not bred to fighting; yet I swear by the sword of St George, before Allah and all of you here present, that I will kill two for every one they kill of us from this day forth, by Allah's help. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amîn." The young man crossed himself devoutly.

The men who heard him, however, only chuckled at this outburst.

One said: "Go away, young hothead. Mix not in quarrels which do not concern thee. Vengeance is taken always, never fear; but subtly, in the way of wise men, not of asses. Go back to the mountain, and leave us to manage things."

Their unbelief so mortified the would-be hero that he left them straightway, weeping bitter tears, and asking Allah to destroy their dwelling-place. Alas! how perfect was the degradation of the people of the cross! His vow might be, in fact, impracticable; but, as an example of religious fervour, it should have won their admiration; instead of which they smiled and gave advice as to an infant. And was it so impracticable? Might it not, conceivably, be performed without much danger? If only one among the host of trampled Christians could do some gallant deed to rouse the others, the triumph of the Faith would surely follow. Still vibrant from the strains of his heroic utterance, with brain inspired thereby, he imagined the task easy.

He saw in mind a place which he had passed that

morning, a lane between high walls without a window ; against one wall a stall containing vegetables, and, on a bench behind it, two old Muslims. Not another soul in sight ! What was there to prevent his taking those two lives, in God's name, for the fulfilment of his vow ? He stopped in imagination and said good-day with the air of a would-be purchaser ; he asked the price of a melon or a cucumber, and when their attention was for a moment diverted from his movements, flashed out his small revolver and shot the nearer in the ear. Then, before the other could recover from surprise, he had emptied a second chamber into his gaping mouth, and was running fast away, as if in terror, crying to the people whom he met that there had been a murder.

A shout of "Oäh ! oäh ! look where thou art going, madman !" and a bump from a donkey's load, recalled him for a moment to the passing scene ; but failed to spoil his elation. He beheld himself the avenger of the murdered Christian, a religious hero of the breed of saints and prophets ; he had done a deed that would dismay the caitiff Muslims, had inaugurated a crusade whose end seemed nothing other than the reign of Christ on earth. Then arose a crying need : he must confide in someone, or his head would burst. But where could he find a man to keep his secret ? A priest, under seal of confession, might be trusted ; but his own priest was in a village of the mountains four hours distant ; and, being a mild man, might impose a heavy penance. Then, as he threaded in a dream the crowded streets, the remembrance of a kinsman of his own occurred to him—a black-bearded, black-browed priest with small fierce eyes and a

noiseless laugh, who served the Maronite cathedral of the city in some slight capacity. The man had spent one summer in the mountain, at his father's house.

At once he bent his steps towards the cathedral, and, making inquiry for his relative in the adjoining shops, soon found his lodging. The priest was at home, and welcomed his distant kinsman when he recognised him, which was not at the first glance.

"O our father!" the young man cried out, "I am in trouble, and to whom in Beyrout can I turn for help except to thee."

"Hast thou killed? Are the avengers of blood on thy tracks?" asked the priest with a certain gusto, stroking his paunch. "Fear nothing. I will hide thee safely."

"No, O abûna, I am not pursued; I come here of my own will, unmolested. But I have killed, and I desire to know the measure of the guilt attaching to me. Not an hour since, walking in a certain street, I saw a crowd and asked the reason of it. A man informed me how a good Christian, of our own communion, was killed last night by a Muslim wantonly. The same man told me there is no redress; the Muslims slay the followers of Christ like dogs daily. At that my heart became a roaring fire, the world was blackened in my eyes, and I felt madness. Passing thence, in that state, I saw two Muslims sitting in a lonely place, and, producing my revolver—here it is!" (he showed the little deadly weapon in his pocket)—"I shot those two before I was aware; and went my way, well pleased. But then I thought I might have sinned, so ran to thee, a priest, to hear thy judgment."

The priest embraced him fondly. "Thy sin, O my son, is light. Pay me four mejîdis to be spent in intercessions, and behold thee spotless!" Having pouched the silver coins, he continued: "I see no sin in thy behaviour more than in that of Mûsa the prophet, when he slew the Egyptian who oppressed God's people. Nevertheless, since there is foulness in the act of killing, perhaps I had better shrive thee to make sure."

Having given the absolution, he again embraced the young man, saying: "In sh'Allah, thou wilt prove as Mûsa proved, a prince and deliverer of God's chosen! a scourge and a consuming fire to El Islâm. Would to Allah every Christian had thy readiness to strike without fear, for the Faith! Farewell, O Yuhanna! remember me to the old man, thy father."

The young man answered nothing, hardly hearing for the throbbing in his ears. His heart was full, he trode on air, and seemed surrounded by a heavenly radiance. He had been compared to Moses, called the predestined conqueror of El Islâm, and full of ardour, must begin God's work at once. He went straight to the lonely place that had been shown to him in his vision, found the two old Muslims sitting at their stall of vegetables, and drawing his revolver, shot them both, unwitnessed. Then, running for his life, he told all those whom he encountered of the horrid murder, so that they ran also, but away from him.

He went on running till the town was left behind, and he found himself in a region of scattered huts and one-roomed houses among gardens and mulberry orchards, with tall reeds feathering the boundary

ditches, and here and there a palm-tree or an umbrella pine standing out sentry-wise in the great sunlight, its shade drawn close around it, like a mantle. Here he left the road and went leisurely, crossing some ploughed land beneath pollard mulberry-trees till he found another track leading back to the town. Courage returned with his breath; he experienced the tremendous exultation of one really chosen of God, for, regarding his escape this minute as miraculous, he concluded that he bore a charmed life.

In a narrow, sandy way between high cactus hedges, he saw a man with a small child hanging on his neck, riding towards him astride of a shambling jackass. Yuhanna glanced behind him and saw no man. He listened sharply with either ear, but caught no sound indicative of human neighbourhood. Grasping the revolver in his pocket, "A happy day!" he called out to the donkey-rider. "Art thou a Muslim, O my uncle?"

"Praise be to Allah. There is no god save God."

"And is this thy son? Ma sh'Allah! A fine boy."

"Praise be to Allah, yes, he is my son."

It was the Muslim's last word. As he gazed fondly down upon his son, Yuhanna fired in his face; his hands went up, his eyes turned over in his head, the donkey sprang aside, and the corpse fell off, the child still clinging to it, shrieking horridly. Yuhanna shot the child, placing the muzzle of his revolver close to the back of its head, and ran on till he spied a gap in the cactus hedge, when he took to the fields.

It seemed so easy: why had no worshipper of

Christ ever thought of it before? It might be because he alone could do it easily, being the chosen. Already the murder of that Christian had been thrice avenged. But Yuhanna, exalted, looked beyond mere vengeance, contemplating nothing less than the gradual extermination of El Islâm. At any rate, he would put such fear in them that every Muslim would go in dread of every Christian, lest he might prove to be the unseen killer, the redoubted scourge of God. He saw himself shooting a notable through the open window of his house—a muezzin from the roof of an adjacent building. Then, when their terror had become disabling panic, Yuhanna would stand forth as the Deliverer, and, cross in hand, would gather all Christ's people to the final carnage.

Thus prophesying in his mind, he sauntered back towards the city by a frequented road. Nine out of ten of the people he encountered were Christians or Druzes, natives of the mountain villages, and the tenth, the Muslim, he was forced to spare through lack of privacy. In the city he found an eating-house, and ate, and drank, and smoked before proceeding. It was late in the afternoon when he resumed his prowl; but he was now in no hurry, feeling that the fulness of his morning's work entitled him to take his ease in wait for a safe shot. At length he happened on a blind beggar sitting in the doorway of an empty house. At the noise of steps approaching, this creature sent up piteous cries to God. The pious terms employed announced a follower of Muhammad.

"Look up, O poor man!" said Yuhanna kindly;

and, as the wretch obeyed, he fired point-blank into one of the sightless eyes. The human form collapsed and lost significance. Yuhanna walked away, without fear this time, feeling safe in Allah's favour. Content with his day's work, he repaired to his khan to supper and to sleep.

In the morning he remembered his deeds of yesterday almost without belief, they seemed so strange to him. He felt a little diffidence at going out, expecting to find the town in tumult, clamouring for the punishment of the author of so many murders. Foremost in his mind now was the original object of his tarrying in Beyrout, which was far from blood-thirsty. His cousin and betrothed, Amîneh, was to leave the convent-school this day for good; for weeks he had looked forward to the four hours' journey with her in the public carriage.

That carriage was full to start with, so that, when it pulled up by appointment at the French convent, Yuhanna, who was in his cousin's place, got out, prepared to hang on somehow by the box. But Amîneh forced him to resume his seat, protesting that she was slender and could squeeze in nicely. The drive, thus pressed together, was a long embrace. But Yuhanna could not thoroughly enjoy it till they had passed the frontier of the Lebanon, being haunted by vague terrors of a hue and cry. Then, as the crazy overladen vehicle jolted on over a road in need of mending, the driver plying his whip, the sorry horses galloping convulsively, ringing bells whose merriment derided their sad plight, the passengers gossiping and jesting, Yuhanna forgot his late adventures, his high destiny in the rapture of close

contact with his beloved. Amîneh wore a flowered gown of chaste simplicity, and a broad-brimmed Frankish hat, beneath whose shade her eyes seemed wells of joy, profound yet sparkling. She wore her hair carried up to the top of her head in the mode of Europe, allowing a glimpse of the nape of her neck, which to every son of the East is ravishingly indecent. He could have loaded her with ornaments of gold, have filled her lap with precious gems, had he possessed them. Then he remembered he had something to bestow, something that would make his love more valuable; for was he not the deliverer of the land, the destined hero of all Christendom?

Having assured himself that their fellow-travellers spoke no French, he told the story of his mission in that language, leaning close to her ear, as the carriage crawled and jolted slowly up the first slopes of the mountain. To his dismay, she cried :

“I call it horrible! Thinkest thou I wish to wed a fighting-man, a kind of brigand? On the contrary, I would have thee shine in commerce, and grow rich. Then we can live in the city there, a life worth living; can mix with cultured people who give soirées and observe the mode of Paris.”

“But listen, darling!” he entreated. “Once my mission is accomplished I shall govern the whole country from Tarabulus to Saida; and thou, my bride, wilt be a queen.”

“Say ‘in sh’Allah!’” she commanded, laughing. “Thou art boastful in thy mood to-day! What ails thee, dear? Am I a child that thou shouldst tell me fairy stories?”

Though he swore by things most sacred, she

refused to hear him; and, curious to relate, her scepticism revived the frenzy of his heaven-sent vision, which, while he deemed her credulous, had almost left him. Since words could not instruct her, she must learn from deeds, from his warlike reputation in the mouths of all men. He swore to return at once to Beyrout and pursue his task there till its grandeur was apparent.

But, reaching home, he found his father had much work for him to do—field-work which could not wait—and it was weeks ere he could find the pretext for another outing. All through those weeks of expectation his zeal was kept inflamed by the continual scoffing of the girl Amîneh. At church on feast-days he was conscious of peculiar sanctity, and whenever the name of David, or of Samson, or of Moses, or of Gideon was pronounced by the priest, he kissed the pavement in an ecstasy of self-devotion. He held himself at the disposal of the Most High, awaiting only his call or opportunity; but sometimes he prayed for that chance, and sometimes feared it. When it came at length, he felt elated. Saying farewell to Amîneh on the eve of departure, he begged her not to tell his father what she knew concerning him.

“Fear not; I shall not tell a soul, O foolish boaster! I would not have the whole world laughing at thee. Now confess, before we part, that thou art lying.”

“No; by Allah Most High, it is true, every word!”

“Then it is finished. I will not speak to thee again till thou canst talk of something else but silly fables. Thou art mad, I tell thee! If thou hast

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killed innocent people, as thou sayest, thou art a malefactor! But it is not so, for thy character is mild and good. Thou art a fool merely, and a most dreadful liar!"

"Before to-morrow night I shall have slain a score of Muslims, in the power of Allah."

"Go, go! and be ashamed," she cried disdainfully.

The public carriage started before the dawn. At sunrise Yuhanna could look down upon the beautiful, accursed city, by the red seashore, its suburbs reaching out across the plain to the foot of mighty mountains starred with villages. Two hours later he alighted in the square. He broke his fast, then went in search of business. All day he wandered through the less frequented streets and beheld many solitary Muslims, yet performed no deed of valour. Somehow his power seemed gone. His hand, his arm, refused to make the needed gestures. He meant beforehand, even prayed, to kill; but when the game appeared, it was as though some devil touched his arm, and froze it. Where were the twenty he had vowed to kill ere night? Already the sun was sinking towards the west. There remained but two hours at the most; he must do something. Clenching his teeth, he swore by the Blessed Sacrament to slay the next follower of Muhammad—were it man, woman, or child—whom he met alone in the way. No sooner had he made the oath than the streets seemed fuller; people appeared in groups of two and three, which, as if of purpose, moved in sight of one another. At last he reached an alley quite deserted, and stood there in the hope of someone coming. But the hope failed him; he was moving on, despondent,

when a Muslim came out of a garden gate in front of him—a tall man in the prime of life, the texture of whose cloak and turban spoke high rank.

Yuhanna clutched his revolver, giving praise to Allah, but as the man approached his arm grew nerveless. He let him pass; then, fearing for his own salvation, turned short round and fired. The man had also turned. His gaze disconcerted Yuhanna—spoilt his aim. He fired a second time, more wildly, seeing death before him, and then took to his heels, but too late; the Muslim had already made the spring to capture him. He was caught and held. He turned to face his assailant, revolver in hand, but the Muslim knocked his arm up, and he fired in the air. At that moment men came running from the garden whence the Muslim had emerged—one, a negro, flourishing a great staff.

“They have fired on our lord the Bey. A hog—a Christian—fired a pistol. Praise be to Allah, our good lord is safe. He holds the miscreant. What wickedness to assail so kind a man! No death is bad enough for such a devil. I will bash his head in with my staff this minute.”

The black came running to perform his threat, but his master stopped him by a gesture. He had just succeeded in wresting the revolver from Yuhanna, who cowered, half-dead with fright.

“It is a poor madman, O Hoseyn,” explained the victor, coolly. “See, now his fit is over, he is weak and harmless. Help me to drag him there inside our garden. If people came it might go badly with him, for he is a Christian, and the vulgar are fanatical; they might not regard his very evident madness.

Now that I have his weapon, there is nothing to fear."

Yuhanna was pulled into the garden, and the gate made fast behind him.

"Shall I fetch soldiers?" asked the negro, eagerly. "He must be put in prison to await the judgment."

"Talk not to me of judgment!" sneered his lord. "He is mad, I tell thee. Did I send him up for trial, being who I am, they would condemn him at a glance, to fawn on me; they would think my intercessions mere hypocrisy—the vice I chiefly loathe. No, let him go. No human court has power to judge his motives. And besides, where I alone am aggrieved, I recognise no judge save the Most High."

"The praise to Allah, for thy mercy!" cried the gardeners. "Wallah, thou art an example to this age."

But the black still pleaded: "O my dear lord, let me beat his back a little. They say it is the medicine for some kinds of madness."

"No; let the poor man be!"

"He may kill others."

"Not immediately. His future is the care of One Above. I have his pistol, which was all his strength. Look at him only! He is helpless as a babe."

"Well, ask his name, in mercy, that we may know him and inquire if he is really mad. He is well dressed, like a student of the college."

"If he is mad, he will not know his name; if sane, he will answer falsely. Let him go! Is the street clear, O Hoseyn?"

"Yes, O my lord!"

"Then I will walk with him a little for protection."

His shots must have disturbed the neighbours, and there may be roughs abroad."

The Bey took Yuhanna's arm and led him by the least frequented ways till they reached a quarter far from the scene of disturbance, when he said :

"May Allah heal thee! Go in peace!"

Yuhanna made a few steps, reeling like a drunken man, then fell at the foot of a wall, annihilated. The shade was black around him, for the sun was setting.

He was not the chosen of Allah, the appointed deliverer of Christ's people. He owed his life to the generosity of a Muslim—such generosity as surely never had been shown by man since Jesus, on the cross, forgave his murderers. He wished now that he had confessed the whole of his guilt to his preserver, believing the confession, though it had entailed a cruel death, would have made his plight less bitter than it was at present. For now those people he had killed might rise from the dead and claim his punishment. Such miracles had been known in the land. He longed to resort to a priest, but feared to be misunderstood. The sly-eyed Maronite, who had incited him to murder, would deride his present feelings; and the French priests, his instructors at the college, would be stern with him. His tale would seem too horrible to foreign ears. As the Muslim had said, he was indeed a madman, whose case could be judged only by the Most High.

Rising at length, he tramped through all that night, and at dawn of the next day saw his native village. As he climbed the path up the terraces, the branch-

ing trunks of the olive-trees alone seemed black and solid, a part of earth ; their foliage had the hue and texture of thin moonlit cloud. Women were descending to the spring, to fill their pitchers. Among them came Amîneh. She turned her face away from him, still quarrelling.

“ I confess,” he whispered. “ They were lies I told thee. Never, I swear by Allah, never will I tell such lies again.”

A QUESTION OF PRECEDENCE

IN the shadow of an archway sat, or rather squatted, Abdullah the merchant. He was not really a merchant, but he loved so to style himself, and those who wished to please him addressed him by that title.

In reality he was but a seller of sweetmeats and iced drinks, one upon whom the real merchants—those who had stalls of their own in the big bazaars, those who dealt in rich stuffs, perfumes, or jewellery—looked down as upon the dirt of the roadway. But Abdullah was proud.

As he squatted in his archway, his long white beard hanging almost into the lap of his many-coloured robe, and his white embroidered turban—the only clean thing about him—concealing the time-honoured dirt of his tarbûsh, he seemed the very soul of dignity. Before him was a stall, a rude structure—neither more nor less than an inverted packing-case—bearing three full-bellied glass bottles, each with its ball of snow instead of a stopper, and a tray of basket-work piled up with a pyramid of oleaginous sweetmeats.

He would have seemed lost in meditation, save that from time to time he gave vent to a dreary,

monotonous chant in praise of his wares; at the sound of which chant sundry yellow, wolf-like dogs lying curled up in the sunlight beyond the archway would raise their heads to blink and yawn, and the pigeons would rise with a flutter of wings from their researches in the roadway, uttering a soft coo of protest.

From Abdullah's corner the minaret of a small mosque, round which the pigeons loved to wheel and coo, was to be seen tapering white against the blue sky. Thence at the appointed hours came the cry of the muezzin calling the faithful to prayer.

But it must not be supposed that dogs and pigeons were the sole companions of Abdullah the merchant. There was a constant going to and fro of people under the archway—veiled women and turbaned men, passing on different errands to fulfil their destinies—many of whom would stay to drink a cup of iced syrup at Abdullah's little stall. At the mosque door sat a blind beggar, whose eternal whine—half plaintive, half peevish—had become part of the atmosphere of the place. Mules, pack-horses, and even camels were occasionally led through the archway. These sometimes troubled Abdullah.

Once a camel came by laden with stone, so that the stone scraped the wall on either hand. Then the aged merchant was driven to beat a hasty retreat to save himself and his stall from destruction. Ever since then he had hated camels, and never failed to curse them when they passed.

Business had been slack on the day in question, and Abdullah was dozing peacefully behind his wares, when a guttural shout aroused him. From

the direction of the mosque a camel was drawing near, laden with stone. He screamed to the driver to wait, but the man paid no heed. Abdullah cursed him from his heart, and hastened to move his goods to the other side of the archway. Then, to his horror, he beheld another camel, also laden with stone, approaching from the opposite direction.

"Each striving to pass the other, they care not what becomes of Abdullah!" he moralised. "Sons of swine that they are! But I will teach them the respect due to a merchant!"

"Sons of a pig!" he cried aloud. "Stay your steps lest evil befall you! Abdullah the merchant is rich, and he has many friends. It is a sin to offend such as he."

But the men paid no heed. Already the first camel was entering the archway with its long swinging steps, and the other was close at hand. Abdullah sighed. He had hoped to impose upon the drivers. Alas! they must be men of the city who knew him well. He lay down flat on his face against the wall and awaited, with bated breath, the upsetting of his stall.

But no! The camels stopped nose to nose. Their burdens scraped the wall on either hand. The archway was blocked for both, and Abdullah's stall was between them.

"Go back, fool!" shouted the first camel-driver, he who had approached from the direction of the mosque. "My master the great merchant, Kheyr-ud-dîn, is waiting. He will slay thee for hindering me, he that is the bosom friend of the Pasha."

"Go thou back!" retorted the other. "My

master the great judge builds a house. He has need of this stone. He is as the Pasha's own brother. He will destroy thee and all thy unclean race for daring to delay me!"

One of the camels, bending its head to take a sweetmeat from Abdullah's stall, overturned two large bottles, so that a stream of snow-cooled fluid poured down the merchant's neck as he lay upon the ground.

Abdullah sprang to his feet. "Sons and grandsons of a dog!" he cried. "Know that I whom you have insulted, whose stall you have all but overturned, whose wares your beasts have defiled, am Abdullah the merchant, beloved of both your masters! Know that the Pasha is but as wax in my hands. Withdraw forthwith, or I will have you slain for your insolence and presumption. Lo! the archway is blocked. Many people are waiting to pass! And you pigs dare to keep them waiting!"

"It is that rascal's fault, old man!" said the first camel-driver, pointing to his opponent. "Make him first withdraw and I will withdraw also. His master is but as a slave to mine. It is for him to withdraw before me."

"Yon fellow is a liar and the son of a liar, old man!" cried the other furiously. "His master is not worthy to wash the feet of mine. And yet he dares to hold the passage against me. By Allah, I shall tell my master of his insolence, and he will tell the Pasha, and the man will be slain and his house destroyed by fire!"

"Make way, O people, make way!" came a loud voice from the direction of the mosque.

"Make way for the harîm of his Excellency the Pasha, who return from the bath. Make way, I say!"

"You hear that voice?" cried Abdullah wildly. "Make way for the harîm of his Excellency the Pasha, who return from the bath. How dare you—malefactors, thieves, scoundrels!—how dare you bar the passage with your wretched quarrel!"

("Make way, make way, curse your fathers!")

"Do thou withdraw," said the first camel-driver to his rival. "It is thy place, for thy master is as dirt compared to mine."

("Make way, I command you, in the name of the sultan's Majesty!")

"Liar! Child of all obscenity! Do thou withdraw, and that quickly! Dost thou not hear them crying to make way? We are both dead men, an thou make not haste to withdraw."

"We shall both be ruined by thine obstinacy, foul father of disgusting sins! How darest thou linger thus? A curse on the religion of thy camel! Draw him back at once, madman, and let me pass on my way."

"Draw back your camels at once!" cried a soldier who had crept up under the load of one of the beasts. "Are we, the servants of the Governor, to stand aside for curs like you? Make way, I say!"

"It is for him to withdraw," cried both the camel-drivers.

"Here, Ali! do you seize these curs while Ahmed and I back the camels," cried the soldier.

The camel-drivers being taken in charge, the archway was speedily cleared. But in the confusion Abdullah's stall was overturned, the bottles broken

in a thousand pieces on the cobblestones, and the sweetmeats scattered far and wide, a prey to the urchins of the quarter.

"Mercy, O my masters, I am a poor man and I am ruined!" cried the merchant, wringing his hands. "I have sat under this archway every day for thirty years, and never have I been treated thus before. Let the rogues of camel-drivers be well punished, O my masters, for indeed they are the worst of criminals."

"What hast thou to do with it, old man?" said the foremost soldier. "Stand aside for the Pasha's harîm, and dare not to howl in this unseemly manner in a public place."

"What hast thou to do with all this tumult?" he continued, when the veiled women had swept past them with their escort.

The camels stood a few yards away in the sunlight, under the charge of a negro. The dogs that had slunk away snarling at the unwonted disturbance were resettling themselves in their former lairs; the doves, which during the tumult had been wheeling excitedly round the minaret, began to resume their old researches in the roadway, and cooed reassuringly to one another.

"Nothing, efendim, nothing; by Allah, I had nothing to do with it," cried Abdullah the merchant.

"He lies!" said one of the camel-drivers sullenly. "He was, in truth, the cause of all the trouble. He told us that the Pasha was like wax in his hands, and promised to have us punished for our insolence. So when we heard you crying to make way for his Excellency's harîm, we thought fit to stay and

finish our quarrel, since we were to be punished anyhow."

"Good!" said the soldier grimly. "Then he also shall taste the bastinado. What is thy name, old man?"

"Men call me Abdullah the merchant."

"Merchant, sayest thou? Then it is not seemly that a man of thy position should go to prison with these dogs. Give me but two mejîdis and go free."

Now Abdullah the merchant had but four mejîdis in the world, and it seemed hard to have to part with half his fortune through the fault of others. Nevertheless, he produced the required sum from some hiding-place under his robe.

"Go thy way in peace, old man," said the soldier. And Abdullah went his way in an agony of rage and grief, to gather together the wreckage of his stall and count his losses.

The camel-drivers looked at each other, and as if by agreement felt under their robes. The one produced a single mejîdi, and the other a handful of small coins.

"Let me also go free, I pray thee," said the one to the soldier who held him.

"It is all I have in the world, efendim," said the other to his guard.

The soldiers took the money greedily and stowed it away under their clothes.

"Sons of crime!" they exclaimed. "What is this? Do you presume to bribe the servants of the Pasha? Your wealth is insufficient to excuse such impudence. Forward! The judge awaits you."

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The doves were cooing softly, wheeling round and round the minaret, which tapered, warm with sunset, on a sky of amethyst. The dogs, missing the sunlight, prowled hither and thither wakefully in search of offal. Merchants passed under the archway, hastening homeward after the toil of the day. But Abdullah squatted still upon his bit of carpet, stroking his beard and looking sadly at the ruins of his stall.

It became quite dark under the archway, though a glow still lingered in the western sky behind the minaret. Then arose a wild chant without time or tune. It was the call to prayer.

Abdullah turned towards Mecca, knelt and performed his devotions. Then he gathered up such of the remains of his stock as might yet be of some use, and turned his steps homeward. He considered :

"I am greater than the camel-drivers, but the smallest servant of the Pasha is greater than I. The Pasha is greater than his servant; but Allah is above us all. If the Pasha's servant is greater than I, Allah's servant must be greater than the Pasha, for who can count the greatness of Allah. I am Allah's servant, therefore I am greater than the Pasha. O Allah, get me back my two mejîdis."

AN ORDEAL BY FIRE

STANDING with face very close to a high wall of glass, with hands clasped at his back, James Pope stared wrathfully out upon the charming prospect of blossomed heads of fruit-trees, white and pink, seeming afloat like summer-cloud low down in the vast sun-filled hollow of sea and sky. Behind him, in a shady hall so big that full-sized carpets looked like rugs upon the floor, his wife sat at a table, letter-writing, with every appearance of most perfect calm. Never turning, he declaimed :

"A miserable race, I tell you, Nora! One Kurd is worth the blessed lot of them. They're either cringing or offensively familiar — damnable! Of course you take your notions from your father and his silly friends, mere theorising Radicals. They don't know these people; I do; and I tell you I could massacre them myself."

Nora laughed at him with a suggestion of impatience. For nearly two hours she had been constraining herself only to laugh at his ill-temper, while he had seemed to take a deliberate pleasure in giving her cause for anger.

"Please say no more," she told him, closing down an envelope. "The Armenians may be all you say ;

it is still no excuse for butchering them. You got out of bed the wrong side ; nothing I say or do is right this morning. I shall ride up to Deramûn, and lunch with Mrs Ellis. It seems a sin to waste this lovely day. Hasan will do for escort. The steamer must be in by now, there'll be letters to occupy you. If you go into the town, post this for me."

By the time he turned round, meaning to visit her with fresh reproaches, she was gone. Well, since she could find it in her heart to go off like that, coolly, in mid-quarrel, before they had arrived at an understanding, he was not going to hang about and say good-bye to her. In petulant haste he snatched up her letter, found his hat and stick, and, going out, took a path which ran cascading down the terraces, under flowery orchards and grey olive-groves, preferable to the dusty highway as an approach to the town.

"Lord, what rot one talks in anger," he thought when he had gone some distance, the folly of his late tirade appearing plainly. Nora might have started, it was no use going back ; but he registered a vow to ride in the afternoon to Deramûn and bring her home with honour.

Near the foot of the tree-clad hill his house surmounted, the orchards fell away, and he surveyed the town. It covered all the narrow plain between hill and sea with a serried growth of flat-topped dwellings, from which some red-tiled roofs devoid of chimneys stood out, shining, like huge carbuncles. Here and there among the houses rose a distaff cypress, and these trees crowded round the principal mosque of

the place, so that a single minaret alone was visible. From time to time a sound of desultory firing shook the sunlight. Having learnt to associate that sound with rejoicings, Pope supposed it was some holiday of Greeks or Armenians, the Muslim feast-days being few and unforgettable.

The sight of unusual animation in the streets presently confirmed this theory, and finding a concourse of Armenians at the French post office, whither business took him, he supposed it was they who were keeping festival. But going out again, with eyes alert, he counted in a short while more white turbans than he ever remembered to have seen in this town before. And all these Muslims moved about in troops, some chanting, some invoking the Most High. Passing the mosque, he saw a train of dervishes come out, bearing in their midst a fine embroidered banner. The mosque, from the glimpse he got of its interior, seemed full of turbaned heads. A murmur as of hornets came from it.

It must be a Muslim feast-day after all, he considered, and called at the English consulate for information. There, too, he found the approaches choked with a herd of excited Christians. The cavasses had to clear a way for him to pass to the consul's room.

Davis the consul sat at his desk in council with three Europeans and about a dozen Turks, when James Pope entered. "What the devil now?" he shouted furiously as the door opened. "Ah, Pope!" he added, with but little change of tone, "you've heard rumours, I suppose? They aren't exaggerated. There was a preachment in the mosque this morning

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by one of the softa from the capital ; it was followed within an hour by twenty murders. They're not warm yet ; you wait ! We had not an inkling till this morning, when the thing was on us. Where's your wife ? At Deramûn ? The best place possible. They're all Muslims there. Join her yourself at once, and stay there, both of you, for the present. The governor and the mosque authorities assure me that there is no danger for Europeans ; but the place isn't fit for a woman. Now go, there's a good man ; I'm most awfully busy."

Out in the streets once more, among the merchants' awnings, Pope felt the tourist instinct to see all there was to see before retiring. His spirit craving shocks to sight and hearing, he was impatient of the usual movement of the streets, the well-known cries and odours. There was an Indian curiosity-dealer, in the Kurdish quarter, with whom he had struck up something of a friendship. The man spoke English, so could give him all the news. He walked some distance towards the Hindi's shop, then changed his mind and took another road, with back to the sea, and face towards the orchard hill, which was visible from time to time where roofs were low. Of course the fun would be in the Armenian quarter. He called it "fun" in thought without brutality, so little sense of tragedy was in his mind. In front he heard the sounds of firing, shouts and screams ; behind him bugles sounded in the Turkish barracks ; but the street in which he walked was quite deserted, the dogs slept undisturbed along its sunlit wall. Excitement took the place of curiosity. He was going simply to traverse the quarter, as he had often done

before, in his way home; but to-day he ran a risk which stirred his blood; if he got through scatheless, he would have a tale to tell.

Suddenly wild shrieks assailed his ears; a group of children running for their lives were seen for a minute. A side street engulfed them. The pursuers followed close—a rabble of small boys armed with long knives, some of which ran blood, calling on God, and shouting out obscenities. At the next turning Pope was in the thick of it, actually jostled by the murderers and their victims, some of whom clutched at him for help. Shots were being fired from upper windows; on the thresholds of some houses fights were raging; but most of the lower storeys had been broken into, and their inhabitants were being butchered in the sunlight. For a moment Pope felt terror on his own account till he saw the slayers paid not the slightest heed to him. It was as if his English hat had been the helm of Perseus, he moved unseen among them, a most strange sensation. The butchers went about their work methodically, much as the priests of old performed a sacrifice, beginning with "Bismillah," and ending with the death-thrust. They killed a woman close to him with all this ritual, the officiators being three old men with long white beards and anxious, kindly faces. "Pigs!" Pope yelled at them. They saw him then and smiled one to another, saying, "He knows some Turkish." One of them stooped down and, ripping open the body of their victim, tore something out and beat it on the wall. The ground rose up with Pope, then yawned beneath him, like a ship at sea. It brought on actual sickness. A kind arm supported him, leading him

clear of the tumult, the while a friendly voice discoursed as to a child: "Efendim, grieve not for them, they deserve to die. It is known they have invented a kind of ball—so big!—which goes off like a cannon, killing everyone. With it they hoped to destroy us Muslimin and all the world except their shameful selves. Efendim, it is justice; but best keep away. The sight affects thee strongly, and our younger men might take offence. Excuse me now, I must return to work. The way lies clear before thee."

Alone once more, and in peaceful surroundings, James Pope strode homeward fiercely, with a throat full of sobs. Breasting the orchard hill, he kept waving his stick about and talking to himself like a lunatic. What devil had made him seek that sight of horror. But for an impulse of curiosity, which now seemed brutal madness, he could have ridden after Nora with clean hands. Now, from head to foot, he felt defiled. He had seen poor people killed—women and children too—his co-religionists, and here he was going home to lunch without a scratch. In vain did his reason plead that interference by an unarmed man was useless, that actual nausea had at the time disabled him. He felt himself unfit to be alive.

On the terrace of his mansion on the hill he was met by Abbâs, the negro doorkeeper, whose services went with the house. The old black smiled in welcome.

"Hast heard the news, my master? They are punishing the Armenians—a just punishment. They had hatched a plot, it is known, to slay all true believers from the sultan down. And moreover, it is said—I know not how truly—that they have

invented a hellish implement—a kind of ball. They throw it and it bursts, and kills as earthquakes do, the just with the unjust, thousands at a blow. Allah is merciful! They deserve to be slain, everyone of them.”

Pope passed him by without an answer. He went into the great reception-hall and wrote to Nora, bidding her stay where she was, and also to Mrs Ellis, the missionary's wife at Deramûn, imploring her to detain his wife for a few days. These two letters he confided to the Greek cook, who, both the horses being out, went off to borrow a neighbour's mule for the journey. That done, he tried to eat some lunch, and, failing, took a chair out on the terrace, and lolled there in the shadow of the house, feeling but half alive.

Why had he ever come back to this accursed land? Why had he brought his bride here on her honeymoon, and hired a house for six months? His father had been consul here, he had known the place as a child and loved its memory; he had wished his wife to know it too, and love it. Before that beastly sight two hours ago he would have called the place as safe as Regent's Park. . . . If only his brain would devise some plan by means of which he might hope to rescue one—only one—of those poor wretches! If only his nerves would suffer him to go down again into the slaughter and get a wound in an attempt at rescue! It was in the hope of some such prompting to retrieve his honour that he hung here inactive instead of joining Nora in a safe retreat.

The best thing he could think of, after hours of cogitation, was to go down to Davis at the consulate

and volunteer for any rescue work that might be going forward. Already the afternoon was well advanced. He would have a cup of tea at half-past five, and then go down in the cool, prepared to work the whole night through if necessary. At present he was overwhelmed with lassitude.

It was past five o'clock, and he still lounged in his deck-chair, too sick to smoke, disgusted with the flowery tree-tops and the sea before him, when he was disturbed by the crack of a rifle close at hand. It was followed by a volley. Men were fighting. Alive in a trice, he ran in the direction of the noise.

The house stood on the summit of the hill. Behind it, as well as in front, the ground fell away in a succession of steep terraces. Half-way down this inland slope, on a projecting knee, a small Armenian village hung like an eagle's nest. It was thence that the warlike din proceeded. The male inhabitants were checking the assault, for Pope saw only women and children in the stream of fugitives already scrambling up the hill. It was marvellous how they covered the rough ground, springing like wild goats, clambering like monkeys, though some carried babies, and had other children clinging to their skirts. Thank God! They were making for his house. A child fell and screamed, the mother kicked it and dragged it prostrate for some yards ere it regained its feet. The foremost drew quite near. They howled to him. He knew not what they said, but called, "Come on!" A girl said, "Thank you, sir! Thank God!" in quite good English. He herded them across the terrace into the house and left them

in the big reception-hall, telling the two Armenian maids to look well after them. As soon as their breath returned they started wailing, and the maids, their co-religionists, wailed with them, useless thenceforth.

Pope went back on to the terrace, pacing up and down. He took a cigarette from his case and smoked quite happily. He saw Abbâs the negro looking sullen, and asked to know what ailed him.

"Are you sorry we have guests indoors?"

"Eyvet, efendim. Such guests bring danger on the house that shelters them."

"But the Kurds will not attack an English house."

"Efendim, if God wills."

"But you would not let these women and children die. They have done no wrong."

"Efendim, they have made a kind of ball——"

"Be silent! They are guests, we must defend them."

"Hâzir, efendim. Am I not thy servant?"

Abbâs sadly resumed his seat upon the ground. Pope finished his cigarette, then went all round the house, securing every aperture as far as possible. But the place remained far from impregnable, the Greek owner, wishing his abode to make a show in the sunlight, having assigned too much space to glass in his plan of building. The terrace, however, made an outer rampart hard to scale, and only one stone flight of steps led up to it. It intoxicated Pope to recognise that he was entirely free from fear.

Presently Abbâs summoned his attention by a low call, and pointed down the terraces. Men were climbing swiftly, flinging themselves from point to

point rather than leaping, now erect, now sprawling, never stopping for an instant. It was dusk down there under the trees, whose tops were warm in the sunset. Pope turned his field-glass on the climbers. Five more fugitives! The face of one was bloody, another's arm bled; all carried knives in their mouths, and two had pistols. As they mounted the last terrace he could hear their heavy panting. "Where is the entrance?" cried the foremost rudely. Pope let them go indoors.

"Efendim!" cried Abbâs, beside himself. "Make them give up their arms. If they fire a shot or strike a blow when the pursuers come, it means the end of us."

Pope followed them indoors, and with the help of the girl who spoke English, persuaded them to give him all their weapons. They said they were the sole survivors of their village; which proved untrue, for in the course of the next half hour, as many more, all badly wounded, straggled in. The wailing of the women got on James Pope's nerves. He told Abbâs to go and make them stop their noise, himself continuing to pace the terrace. What with the long suspense and the approach of night, he found his courage ebbing; and felt fear, less of a possible danger, than of his own nature, lest he should again be seized with nausea, and incapacitated.

At length a murmur of voices rose in the still air—a peaceful sound it seemed. The pursuers, if it was they, were in no haste. They had come by the easiest route, a long way round, and were now moving leisurely up the broad high road. Abbâs, invoking the Supreme Protector, went off to his proper post

outside the carriage-gate. Pope's heart beat in his head; he strode to and fro like a caged beast; and in truth suspense encaged him as with bars of iron. He heard much shouting at the gate, where the expostulations of Abbâs, a fellow Muslim, detained the killers for five minutes. Then came a mighty shout of "Dîn Muhammad!" and he knew that the mob was coming towards him slowly as before. "O infidel!" a man cried out, as preface to a long harangue, of which Pope could make nothing, the language being high flown and religious. He was aware of many swinging blots of light down by the ground, the light from lanterns carried in men's hands. Those lanterns made it black night all at once, though the windows of the house still felt the sunset.

Abbâs came up the steps to join his master. He interpreted :

"They have sworn a solemn oath to slay these people. Against thee, they have nothing. Do but stand aside!"

"Didst thou not tell them that they are our guests, that the honour of our house is their protection?"

"Of course I did; it is the proper answer. But might it not be well to reconsider?"

"No, by Allah."

"Then they will storm the house."

"No, that they dare not. I am an English subject. They know too well what follows. Tell them that if they use the slightest violence, they will everyone of them be hanged in a month's time."

Pope soon saw that his boast had not been empty. They were unwilling to assault a British subject.

Abbâs became the centre of a long discussion, to which Pope tried to listen. Would no one silence those mad women there in the house? Their screams, distinctly audible now there was a hush, were bound to excite a mob whose love was murder. He leant over the parapet and called, "Abbâs."

"Here, efendim."

"We have said our last word. Come indoors with me, and bid these people go their way in peace."

This speech, intelligible to the crowd, evoked a perfect storm of execration. Many shots were fired, to scare the Englishman. Abbâs came slowly up the steps to join him. Together they were entering the house, when a shout went up from the outskirts of the throng below, spreading rapidly till it became a roar of triumph. Abbâs started, and then trembled violently.

"Efendim, their cry is, they have caught our lady."

"They lie; she is at Deramûn. Go and demand some proof of what they say. Let me speak with her, or I shall know their words are lies."

Abbâs was absent but a minute. "They refuse to bring her to thee, fearing some stratagem, but they will give thee proof that it is really she. There is no doubt, efendim."

He stood a moment by his master's side, then went indoors. Someone in the crowd cried out to Pope in English:

"Do hear reason, sir. Armenians wicked fellows. Fifty thousand Armenians not be worth the memsahib."

It was his friend the Indian curiosity-dealer. Had Pope wished to reply, there was no time, for just then

a man ran up the steps and fell at his feet, blubbering. It was his own Greek cook.

"O Holy Virgin! Saints beneficent! They have caught our gracious lady. I gave her thy letter, but she would not tarry. Hearing there was trouble, she came back to thee. Now they have caught her, and will harm her unless thou speak some word of power to save. Speak that word, my master, ere we die of fright."

Pope's purpose was completely overborne. What was his duty towards these howling, mad Armenians to compare with that which he owed to Nora, his own wife? She was an Englishwoman, quite alone and innocent, and he had brought her to this country, exposing her to perils, simply for his own whim. He went to drive out the Armenians.

In the great reception-hall he found Abbâs before him, explaining to its inmates that the lady of the house was captured by the enemy. Of course all they, being folk of no account, must go out to their death that she might live. Bad luck for them, but so it was written on the tables of destiny.

The despair of those poor wretches at his words was dreadful to witness. Women rolled and grovelled on the floor in anguish, tearing their bosoms with their finger-nails, pulling out their hair by the roots. One wounded man was licking the negro's feet. A woman, like a fury, tore his sleeve. The girl who spoke good English ran to Pope and flung her arms round his neck. "Kill us yourself, dear sir!" she shrieked. "In mercy, kill us!"

The nausea of the morning came again upon him; he could not do as he desired.

In a voice quite strange to himself he told Abbâs to let the poor things be.

"You do not deliver them up ; our lady suffers?" questioned the Muslim, paralysed with horror.

"It must be so. The lady is myself. She would not wish our house to be dishonoured."

Immediately he repented of the words ; they were heroic, and his motive was pure cowardice. They had a strange effect upon Abbâs. The negro stared at him a moment, taking stock of his emotion. Suddenly he put out both his hands and touched him, then drew the said hands slowly down his own black face. It is the way the Muslims handle holy marvels.

"Get out, old fool!" Pope thundered in a fury.

"Could we not fight our way and rescue her?" he asked after a while with sudden brightness. "These men would help, and there are arms for all."

"Efendim, it is useless. What would happen? While yet we fought our way, they would remove the lady, and those behind would break into the house. Only thy presence stops them."

The crowd outside were clamouring for his answer. "My God, how can I speak to them!" cried Pope, despairingly.

"Move not—I am thy mouthpiece," said Abbâs, and left him. Pope followed from sheer weakness. With a disgust that was near to hatred he heard the negro calling for admiration for an act of heroism worthy to be written in gold in the noblest annals of hospitality. Pope caught the dotard by the arm and dragged him back.

The crowd expected him to say something, he

supposed; but at the moment he could think of nothing in their accursed jargon, except some foul expressions which he hurled at them. Abbâs, from behind him, reminded them that the English government would have every one of them hanged, if they should harm the lady.

"Thou hast said, O infidel!" The crowd laughed viciously. Again some shots were fired. A bullet whistled past Pope's cheek, and struck the wall. He wished to God that it had stretched him out. Then they were gone—in a flash, it seemed to him. The stars throbbed tranquilly above the silent trees. A dog was barking somewhere not far off. But for the ceaseless lamentations of the Armenians, he could almost have enjoyed this tragic calm. It was but charity to kill such shrieking brutes. Their presence made the house obscene; he could not enter it, but paced up and down the terrace under the stars.

A sound of hoof-beats on the road brought hope again. It might be they had led her off simply to frighten him. She would come riding back with Hasan in attendance, laughing at her adventure. But presently his ears assured him that a troop of riders was approaching. Perhaps she had been rescued by the garrison. The horsemen came in at his gate; there was no longer any doubt as to their destination. He vowed to lead a stricter life in future, if only they had brought her safe and sound. He shouted something to inform them of his presence.

"Is that you, Pope? What is this about your wife?" The speaker was Davis—foremost of a troop of horsemen, it might be ten or twenty; Pope was

quite past counting. The consul sat his horse squarely. Pope cowered in spirit as before a judge. In a toneless voice he made confession of his shame.

"They caught her coming home and held her as a kind of hostage for exchange against the fifty odd Armenians who have taken refuge in my house. I was off my head at the time, and, like a fool, declined to bargain. They've taken her away down there, and I feel like shooting myself."

He expected to be treated as an outcast, a brute beast; but Davis was up the steps in a minute, clasping his hand. The consul wore no hat; his head was bandaged.

"Keep calm, old fellow. They won't dare to hurt her; they know too well we'd make it hell for them. Of course, I throw up all the other work and look for her. These are my helpers, mostly Turks. They know every cranny of the town. We'll bring her back in no time, never fear!"

"Stay, I'll come with you."

"No, you won't, my son! You've got to guard your refugees. Fifty, whew! that's splendid. We've been working hard all day, and so has a French party, and we haven't saved a hundred head, all told. You stay where you are and keep your pecker up. I'll leave two men here. We'll be back directly, inshallah."

Never had Pope known Davis so cordial. The consul's usual manner was almost irritatingly languid and supercilious. The change encouraged him a good deal, marking, as it did, approval of his conduct. He still felt guilty of betraying Nora, but was glad to know his guilt was not self-evident. After little more

than an hour, which seemed a century, he heard again the tramp of hoofs. Going to the edge of the terrace, he strained his eyes towards the carriage gate.

"It's all right, Pope," the consul's voice rang out, and for the first time the howling of the Armenians sounded good to him. "We traced her easily. She's unhurt, we think, but scared to death, poor creature. Quite unconscious. Couldn't wait to get a litter, so put her up before me on the saddle. Hamdi Bey walked alongside and kept her steady. Got any women in the house? They'd be more use than we are!"

"They are damned brutes, these Kurds," he said, ten minutes later, preparing to mount again. "It seems they quite intended to release her, having frightened you, but first—by way of fun, they say—they made her witness a most beastly sight—three women murdered with the usual ritual. Your groom, Hasan, deserves a medal. He stuck to her through it all. I hear he knifed a rascal who was insolent. Your Indian friend, though one of the ringleaders, stood by her too; we found her in his house. I sent a message to the doctor to come up."

The doctor came and spent that night in the house. Early next morning he informed Pope that his wife was conscious, but above all things seemed to dread her husband's presence. Insane aversions often followed on such shocks as that she had sustained, and must be humoured, or the patient's mind might suffer permanently. He therefore asked James Pope to keep away from her, and to order her attendants never to name his name, nor allude to the disorders, nor let her guess there were Armenians in the house.

As soon as possible she must go home to England in charge of a proper nurse. Pope bowed assent, feeling himself justly punished. That Nora knew how he had failed her there seemed now no doubt.

A month later, at her father's house in London, he ventured to transgress the doctor's edict and implore her forgiveness, while endeavouring to give her some idea of the dilemma in which he had been caught on that atrocious night. For some time she appeared not to grasp his meaning ; then all at once she seized his hand and stopped him with an outcry of amazement :

"You saved Armenians? . . . O, why was I not told of this before. You sacrificed even me sooner than give them up! If I had only known, I could have borne everything. I thought you still approved of all that wickedness ; you had defended massacres, you know, that very morning ; and I remembered your words while I was suffering the intensest agonies through sight and hearing. You came to stand for all the horrors I had witnessed. I dreaded the very sight of you, till just this minute, when all the while you were a hero, if I had but seen it!"

James could not see it himself.

KARÀKTER

A SYMPTOM OF YOUNG EGYPT

“KARÀKTER—karàkter—karàkter!” The barbarous word kept recurring in the speech of the white-bearded fellâh, as he sat, with hands reverently folded in his hanging sleeves and eyes downcast, on the outmost edge of the chair proposed to him by the English official to whom he came as a suppliant.

“Karàkter! I want the boy to learn karàkter, that by its virtue he may become a power in the land. In the English schools they tell me that karàkter is placed first among the subjects which the pupils study. I came to hear of it by chance—O happy chance!—when the champions of Tanta came to play our boys at football. They of Tanta called upon the Sayyid el Bedawi to give them victory, and we invoked our lord Ibrahîm ed-Dessûqi. But the Sayyid Ahmed was the stronger, or else our saint was asleep; for they won. Efendim, I was watching the battle, all eyes for my son’s prowess, when, marvelling at the energy of the combatants, I cried: ‘Wallahi, excellent. They surpass their instructors. Our sons outstrip the English, our good lords!’ But one at my side said: ‘No, for they still lack karàkter; and

without it there is no superiority.' At once I asked him what karàkter was; and he told me that the English, alone of all mankind, possess the secret of it, but it can be acquired in their schools for money. Efendim, we have money nowadays. Formerly one dared not hint at the possession, least of all in the hearing of a ruler like your Excellency; but to-day all that is changed—the praise to Allah and our English lords. And because I love our English lords, and admire their qualities, I would have my son instructed in karàkter, by the knowledge of which they are above all else distinguished. Efendim, do but name to me the best school in your country for that science, and my son goes there to-morrow."

The old man bowed his head and waited patiently for an answer; while his son, the same who was to learn karàkter, stood, silent and apparently indifferent, beside his chair. The boy, about fourteen years of age, wore a European suit of the cheapest sort—pale yellow patterned with a large black check—which might have fitted him two years before; but now he had so far outgrown its capacity that two inches of white sock showed between the trousers and his yellow boots—the hue of duck's feet—and the sleeves of the jacket could by no means be pulled down to hide his strong brown wrists. He wore his fez well forward, at his father's bidding, in honour of the English inspector.

The latter sat at his desk, with face half turned towards the visitors. He arranged some papers with one hand, while the other stroked his hair, and seemed to be struggling with a wish to laugh.

"You want me to recommend a school in England for your son here present?"

"Efendim, yes; that he may learn karàkter. The English schools are first in all the world for instruction in that science."

"But, O sheykh, karàkter is not a science. It is strength and durability of purpose; it is power of judgment. Some have it in them, some have not. It is not a thing which can be taught like mathematics!"

"No matter, efendim. It is found in England. Ma sh'Allah! My son is intelligent, and has been well taught. He speaks English like an angel from Allah. Speak a little, O Ahmed, O my son! Let his honour judge of thy accomplishment. Compliment his honour prettily in English, as they taught thee in the school."

Thus adjured, the boy, with a sudden smile that seemed spasmodic, enunciated in high level tones:

"Great sir, let God bless you and all which are near to you. I luf to stand before your noble face. True, sir, this is the hab-yes day of all my life."

"You see!" exclaimed the father proudly, "he speaks the English like his mother tongue, after studying it for only half a year; he is so quick to learn. If I send him to school in England for three or four years he will acquire a knowledge of karàkter too, in sh'Allah."

"But schools with us, O sheykh, are not for nothing. Here in Egypt rich men grumble if asked to pay a pound a month towards their children's education. In England twenty pounds a month for learning, food, and lodging is paid without a murmur."

The old fellâh, so humble in dress and appearance, made no demur. He said: "We have enough, the praise to Allah. Twenty pounds a month is not too dear for sound instruction in karâkter, which makes men like your Excellency. Of your charity, efendim, make inquiry for me; and when you have found the school, deign to write me a line—a single line with the hand of kindness. Just the name of the master and the address of the institution. My son reads English writing. Ennoble my name: it is Abdul Câder Shazli. My izbâh is called Tût, belonging to the village of Mît Karam. And the name of my son? Is Ahmed, efendim—Ahmed Abdul Câder. May thy good increase!"

Father and son then retired from the presence, the former calling blessings on his noble Excellency, the latter staring vaguely straight before him. Outside the government rest-house a mule and an ass were waiting in the charge of a ragged servant. The pair mounted, and jogged along the Nile-bank to their own place, marked in the distance by a grove of trees. Ahmed gazed at the familiar outline of those trees, and was glad. The outlines of the government rest-house, both without and within, being strange, had seemed hostile, carrying a chill to his heart. His mind was easily foiled by externals, playing with them, puzzled, like a drowsy kitten, supposing them good or bad, but vaguely and without vehemence. Set upon a dust-heap in his father's yard, he would stare for minutes at a time at the brown sheep or the poultry, and, roused at last, would as likely as not move peculiarly, in unconscious imitation of a strutting rooster. At school, too, whither he, with

other sons of wealthy farmers, went with alacrity, regarding it as a place of games, where strange puzzles were propounded to amuse the sight and hearing—at school he would sit staring at the page before him till he knew the position of every vowel-point and lurking hamzeh, and could recall the whole at will, with each inflection of the master's voice when he read aloud for an example. It was the same with the English text-books of history and geography. Having once learnt to connect the shape and sound of words, he could remember their relative position on the printed page, and reel off the whole book by rote. This facility of learning won the praise of his instructors; he came to regard himself as of the cleverest where all were clever; and it was with a shock that, when an English inspector came to examine his class, he found that he could not understand the question put to him. Its significance was explained: "By what places would you pass in going from Cairo to London?"

Still regarding the question as bearing upon what he had learnt, Ahmed answered from the book, observing:

"London is the cabital of England; it is the largest city of the world. It contains more than fife million inhabitants, or about half the bobulation of the whole of Egybt."

The inspector stopped him in a voice of anger. He repeated the question: "How would you go there?"

"How should I know?" muttered Ahmed in Arabic. "I have never been, to find out. The khawâgah is mad; he is cheating. It is not in the book."

And when the Englishman was gone, the Egyptian masters also said that he had cheated.

From that incident Ahmed had derived a bad opinion of the Franks as people ever ready to take mean advantage. To-day, in presence of the high official at the rest-house, he had felt the same as at that examination, and had stood expecting to be asked some unfair question. If he desired to learn karàkter, it was only because his father told him it was the thing which made the Franks unanswerable. Knowing it, he would be their equal, if not master.

At the farm, consorting with the children who herded buffaloes, or playing a game with pebbles on a dust-heap, eating well, sleeping soundly, happy to sit in the sun and watch a dungbeetle, he awaited the promised message. After two weeks it came. A shawîsh on horseback rode up to the doorstep of the grand new house with glass windows, which the Sheykh Abdul Càder had built for show, not habitation, and had filled with Frankish furniture. The soldier, as emissary of the great, was allowed to enter its closed rooms, and there regaled with coffee and a variety of sweetstuff, while young Ahmed in the foul old-fashioned homestead, close behind it, deciphered and translated the Englishman's note. A school and a master were named; there followed a list of clothes and other requisites.

Ahmed was taken by the train to Cairo, to grand foreign shops where both father and son were dismayed by the fixity of price, to the governorate and to the English consul's office. Then, with his new luggage, he was conveyed to Alexandria; basking in the atmosphere of importance without forethought,

till he found himself alone on board the steamer, which began strange movements, when he crept into his bunk, and cried, and gnashed his teeth, for eighteen hours.

Awaking in a dark and stuffy place, he heard curious noises, and stole out to seek the cause. Along a dim corridor and up a staircase, he burst forth into sunlight, and felt sudden joy. Sailors were washing the decks; they smiled to him; the sky and sea were smiling. He sat down on a coil of ropes and watched the dance of sun-flakes on the waves, for ever rushing past, yet always there beside him. An Englishman on board had promised to take care of him. The man was kind; he often talked to Ahmed, and he looked after him in the landing at Marseilles and throughout the long train journey till they reached another sea, and, taking ship, saw England. Ahmed beheld a land cloud-coloured, wrapped in cloud, the sea that lapped its cliffs seeming colourless as foggy air. The crowding of strange sights, the cold, the lack of brightness reduced the young Egyptian to a state of sullen torpor. He arrived at the school and, after a brief inspection by the master, a most awful figure, was left to face the stare of other boys.

These fell upon him, dragged him this way and that, jabbering meaningless sounds to signify his native tongue, called him by evil names such as "nigger" and "slave"; but the native sociableness of the Egyptian soon disarmed them. Ahmed took everything in good part, even their laughter at his way of speaking. He accepted their point of view, laughed with them at his own ridiculousness, for was

not their star manifestly in the ascendant? It was the season of football, and he was an excellent player; the goal in front, the flying ball, exciting all his faculties with the sense of an immediate aim. Cricket, when the time came, proved too slow, the object too remote, to please him greatly; yet he played it slavishly to please his comrades, and won praise. The elder boys took notice of him, and the younger sought his friendship. The whisper ran that he was a prince, and Ahmed smiled assentingly. He was whatever they liked, their servant to command, provided only that they did not bully him.

The holidays he spent at first in a household recommended by the man who had escorted him to England; but afterwards, when his popularity was established, at the homes of schoolfellows; upon whose sisters he cast longing eyes made shy by fear of vengeance did he dare assail them.

At his studies he was very diligent, and quite as happy as at play. He was quick at languages, and great at every science that depends on formulas. As his mental power increased, he could deduce from what he learnt corollaries, which, however, never passed the mental sphere, or bore the slightest application to the facts of life. Learning was, for him, a game of the wits, worth playing chiefly since it won applause. He became as popular with the masters as among the boys. "I am not only equal with the English," he was able to write to his father, "but am on my way to become the chief among them. I am praised daily by my instructors; all my comrades love me."

In the same letter he asked his father's permission to proceed to the university, as that was the chief

place for the formation of character, no Englishman being regarded as complete who had not been there. In conclusion, he assured his father that the cost of living at the university would not exceed the sum which was being paid annually for his schooling. His father consented, in a letter full of moral reflections, urging him to seek and secure for himself karàkter as the talisman of all success in life.

Therefore, in course of time, he went to Cambridge, changed his friends and learnt new formulas, was initiated into the mysteries of love and fashion, and shone in coloured shirts, in ties, in waistcoats. He bought a little dog and tried to like it, but every time the creature licked his hand he shuddered, conscious of extreme uncleanness. He was in his second year, at home and popular, with the prospect of distinction in the Mathematical Tripos, when a letter from his father shattered everything.

"Seeing thou art now a man full grown," wrote the Sheykh Abdul Càder, "and must by now have learnt karàkter and all the other wiles of the English, tarry there no longer, for my heart yearns after thee. Besides, a certain great one with a kindness for me promises to exert his influence on thy behalf, to obtain for thee a good position in the government. So return to us at once without delay, and may Allah strengthen and preserve thee ever."

When Ahmed opened and perused this letter, he was not alone. A man named Barnes, a mild and weak-eyed youth, was seated with him, smoking a briar pipe, in Ahmed's cosy rooms, whose walls were hung with photographs of grinning women.

"What a nuisance!" said Ahmed, frowning in the

approved English manner, though his heart was glad. "Dash it all, my dear ole man, I'm to go back to Egypt at once; the gufnor says so. Must gif up thought of my degree. The dear ole gufnor. He doesn't know how much it means to me."

"Can't you write and explain to him?" said Barnes feelingly.

"No, no, my dear ole chab! Imbossible. He would neffer understand." Here Ahmed sighed profoundly. "We are still awf'ly primitif at home in Egypt—quite behind the times. . . . I must leaf at the end of term; there's no helb for it. I shall be defish sorry to leaf all you dear good fellows."

"I shall be sorry too," said Barnes heartily.

This Barnes was of the order of amateur missionaries to be found in every generation of undergraduates, for whom the Mohammedanism of Ahmed Abdul Câder was an irresistible attraction. The gentleness and urbanity of Barnes pleased Ahmed greatly; they had become inseparables, and, without any promise of conversion, it was understood between them that Ahmed was to be the apostle of a new era in his native land. Barnes made his friend a parting gift: the Bible, which Ahmed accepted with a profusion of thanks, even with tears, hardly restraining the impulse to embrace the donor. But in the confusion of packing he forgot the present, which thus, being left behind, became the perquisite of his bedmaker.

Ahmed was extremely glad to go. He looked forward with a natural longing to his father's house, to the sight of camels raising dust upon the Nile-bank, of buffaloes wallowing and grunting in a reedy

pool. To see the crowd of fellahîn assembled at the wayside station, to hear the familiar greetings as his father kissed him, was like waking from a dream to blest reality.

"Look at him, how he walks! Behold his modishness!" cried the Sheykh Abdul Câder, quite beside himself with exultation. "It is well seen that he has learnt karàkter thoroughly. We, too, are become more modish since thy going, O my son. By Allah Most High, we have a treat in store for thee."

The treat turned out to be a giant gramophone, installed in the best room of the grand new house, thrown open to the world that day in honour of his home-coming. It was kept going incessantly by the efforts of two bare-legged helpers. Ahmed was annoyed at sight of it, having learnt in England to despise such noisy instruments; but when he found the records were of Arab music, reproducing the chant of the best singers, male and female, and splendid versions of the Call to Prayer, he smiled at the brazen trumpet-mouth as at a friend.

"Thou hast learnt karàkter, is it not so, O my son?" inquired the Sheykh Abdul Câder, speaking loud against the music.

"By Allah, that have I, O my father. It is a matter hard to catch as is a lizard; yet I have caught it, knowing thy desire."

His boast was, in truth, no vain one. He had acquired the English character superficially just as he had learnt by heart whole text-books in old days at school. He could assume it instead of his own, at any minute. He could even constrain himself to think like an Englishman for hours at a stretch.

"Praise be to Allah!" said the old man fervently. "To-morrow I will present thee to the notable of whom I wrote thee word that he has promised to take care of thy career—one set high in wealth and station, who sees the need of more karàkter here in Egypt. It is not so simple now as it was formerly; thou wilt have to undergo examination. But that, I doubt not, will be passed with honour; no other competitor can have had thy advantages. In sh'Allah, by force of karàkter, thou wilt soon rise to greatness."

"In sh'Allah!" echoed Ahmed cordially; for the prospect of an easy rise to power seemed good to him. He was not without ambition of a supple kind.

The preliminaries were soon over. His father's friend approved of his demeanour; he passed the examination easily; and soon afterwards obtained, by influence, his first appointment as secretary to an English official in the Public Works Department. The post entailed his taking rooms in Cairo, whereas he had hoped for employment within a riding distance of his father's izbah. He had married in the weeks since his return, and his father would not let his bride go up to Cairo; better one than two in the city, he declared, where food is costly; on the farm an extra mouth made no great difference.

Ahmed, however, put regrets behind him, and repaired to the office with a will to please his chief. That chief was young, not five years older than Ahmed, and his mind was set on the acquirement of Arabic, of which he knew already many vulgar and obscene expressions. Finding his English speech

not well received, Ahmed was quick to divine the other's foible, and flattered it by addressing him in flowery Arabic, and praising his excellence in that tongue.

"I haven't mastered it yet, though," said the Englishman, relapsing into English, "I should be obliged if you'd help me a bit."

"Most willingly," responded Ahmed with his ready smile. It was all he wished—to be of service, to win the regard of his chief, so that their work together might go forward comfortably.

The Englishman showed him copy-books and brought him exercises written in a hand like print, and Ahmed gave advice and made corrections—this in the intervals of office-work, which, being a routine requiring chiefly memory, seemed easy for the Egyptian. After a little while, the pair grew intimate; the Englishman forgot his first desire to air his Arabic, and conversed with his secretary freely on all kinds of topics. His character was of the simple English type, well-known to Ahmed, who had therefore no difficulty in anticipating his views and wishes. The Egyptian sometimes forgot their relative positions, and talked to his chief as he had talked to Barnes and other men at Cambridge. And his chief made no objection till a certain day, the blackest of all days, a day to weep on—which became the turning point of Ahmed's life.

They were sitting together in their room as usual when a clerk of lower grade came in with a request about some trifle. Seeing his chief get up and look unduly worried, Ahmed, with no other thought than to save a good friend trouble, exclaimed:

"Don't be a fool, old man! Sit down. It's nothing, really."

He had been sitting back in his chair, with legs crossed nobly, in the English manner; next minute he was on his feet, his face livid, his body shaken from head to foot by shame and grief. For his friend flashed round on him, ejaculating:

"Damn your insolence! What the hell do you mean by speaking to me like that?"

The clerk of lower grade was grinning from ear to ear.

"Why, whateffer did I say?" questioned Ahmed, his voice trembling with rage.

A flood of oaths was the answer. Ahmed drew himself up.

"I haf you know, sir, I haf been to Cambridge."

"Go to hell!"

And when the clerk had retired, the still angry Englishman quoted, as he sat down again at his desk, a vile Arabic proverb, an invention of the Turks, to the effect that if you encourage Ali, he will presently defile your carpet. It was an offence unthinkable.

How he got through the rest of that day's work Ahmed never knew! It was performed in anger, dimmed by acrid tears of shame. He hardly heard his chief's repeated adjurations to him not to be an ass; and answered all his orders with a simple "Yes, sir."

"There now, I'm sorry if I hurt your feelings. But you mustn't really use that tone to me, least of all in the presence of subordinates. Come, don't sulk any longer. Make it up, old man."

Ahmed heard the words and felt the hand on his

shoulder, but made no response. When at last he left the office, he went not to his lodging but to the Nasrîyeh railway station.

At dusk he entered the yard of his father's izbah. The people greeted him with shouts of joy. Their welcome loosed the fountain of his grief, till then restrained by pride. He ran to the threshold, and there fell down and wept and moaned convulsively. The Sheykh Abdul Câder, leaning over him, attentive to the broken words his woe flung forth, piecing them together patiently, at last obtained some notion of the matter.

"Is it of thy khawâgah that thou speakest. Did he beat thee, O my son?"

At the question Ahmed roused himself, and spoke intelligibly.

"No, O my father! Would to Allah he had done so, that I could have prosecuted him for the assault, and made his name a byword for tyranny! He cursed me, O my father; he blackened my face with foul and grievous insults; and all because I addressed him in the usual English manner as a friend. I will no longer endure such treatment, I will be a nationalist. I was a friend of greater men than him at Cambridge. My best friend, Barnes, is the son of an English lord, whereas this dog is but the offspring of a base merchant—he himself confessed it! I will write to Barnes and have this dog degraded!"

The women and the neighbours wailed in concert, without any clear conception of the call for grief. But the old man raised his hands and eyes to heaven, crying:

"Praise be to Allah! Behold me justly punished

for my proud ambition. I asked karàkter for my son, and see, he has it—more than I can bear. What Son of the Nile before him ever resented the curses of one in authority? Are not our backs and the soles of our feet still sore from the Turkish whips? Yet see, my son resents this cursing which to me is nothing. He must join the malcontents, the wastrels of the land, because of it. He is become even worse than an Englishman; he is all karàkter!”

A CASE OF OPPRESSION

ACROSS the wide green plain the sun was setting, and the town sent up its cries of glad relief. In the suburb of white-washed, red-roofed buildings round the railway-station, as incongruous with the mud-built native town as a gramophone on a camel's back—which also may be seen to-day in the Egyptian delta—some masons, who for three months past had been engaged in the erection of a fine two-storeyed house, knocked off work for the last time. The job was finished, they gave praise to Allah ; and were in the act of removing tools and hods and barrows from a temporary wooden shed put up to shelter them, when an old man came and wished them a happy evening. They returned his greeting casually, and were resuming songs and private jests, when the stranger added :

“Whose is this house? I wish to buy it.”

Then they stopped their work and looked more closely at him. Their stare revealed a soiled white skull-cap, own brother to that which sheathed the crown of everyone of them, except their sheykh, who wore a turban also ; two pointed ears which stuck out much above it, seeming handles to a wrinkled face of childlike gravity ; a robe that had once been blue,

open at the chest, and leaving bare two gnarled brown legs with feet encased in the cheapest of slippers—a poor man, if there ever was one, one no richer than themselves.

“Whose house is it?” the object of their gaze repeated, unperturbed.

The sheykh of the builders stepped close up to him, and laughed in his face.

“May Allah keep thee, O thou blessed one! Art an afrit or what? The house is a fine one as thou sayest, and convenient; and I would let thee have it were it mine to sell. But know, O lord of wealth, that it belongs to the Government, and will shortly be occupied by one of their grand officials. It is worth ten thousand pounds; hast thou that much in thy hand at present?”

The old man gaped at first at this announcement, but presently he smiled, as seeing light, and said:

“I mean not that great stone house, but this small wooden one. Behold I am a pilgrim of three years ago. Three years have I taken to return from the City of Light; and I am weary and would settle down. I find this city pleasant for repose, and when, a minute since, I spied this little house and you, its inhabitants, in the act of moving, I said in my soul: ‘O soul, behold the very place for thee and me to dwell in till the end.’”

The masons turned and glanced at one another with furtive smiles and winks, as who should say: “A fool! A Godsend!” They conferred in whispers; then their sheykh stood forth:

“That is another matter, O my uncle. I understood thy words to refer to that great palace, and, of

course, derided them. This little house is mine, its price a low one. Step inside, I entreat thee, see how nicely built it is, all of the choicest wood and nails of iron—the nails alone are worth the price I ask, which is five pounds Egyptian. Only! It is a gift I make thee.”

The buyer shook his head, while cunning crept into his childlike smile.

“It was a fancy of mine to ask the price,” he told them, “but I am not a lord of wealth as thou didst, joking, name me. I cannot afford to gratify each passing whim. Now, hadst thou said two napoleons——”

“I seek refuge in Allah! O old man, it is well seen thou art a devil! Why, look around thee, see the excellent workmanship, the strong materials. This solid wooden post alone is worth thy two napoleons.”

“Or three——?”

“I call Allah to witness! . . . Hear my last word: Thou shalt have the property—land, wood, and nails—for four napoleons paid into my hand this minute. It is to give the place away, I know that well; and I would ask any other than thyself three times as much. But because thou art here before me, the money with thee, and because we have to catch the train which waits for no man, I will take that price. What! dost still shake thy head, old madman? That, for a freehold which has not its like in all the town, adjoining palaces!”

“Hadst thou said three napoleons and a half——”

“Then let it be so, though Allah knows I thus defraud myself; for the love of thy old beard! Call

it my present to thee. Tell down the money now, and all is said !”

Two or three soldiers from the police-station up the road, a beggar woman, and some children had drawn near to watch the bargaining. The sun had set ; the white road and the scattered, white-washed houses wore a ghostly pallor, the many windows of the latter staring like dead eyes.

“First,” said the old man slyly, “I must have the paper.”

“Paper ! In the name of Allah, what paper ? Hast thou the face to ask for papers, when I make a gift to thee ? It were a shame for me to record the price on paper,” quoth the seller, angrily. “My enemies would make sport of my good nature. No, no, my promise is enough security ; and all these grown-up men, my sons, are here as witnesses to the contract.”

“Merciful Allah ! Are all these thy sons ?” murmured the buyer, staring round upon the grinning builders. “Ten of them ! Thou art blest indeed !”

“May Our Lord bless thee ! . . . Come, what sayest thou ?”

“The security is good, no doubt, as between man and man ; but the law requires that I must show a paper, which is called my title to the house and land. No need, my dear, to name the price in it ; write any sum that pleases thee, to save thy name.”

“O Allah, hear him ! He instructs us all. He knows the law, this dotard, and must have a paper. It is enough. We will not sell to him. We must be going !”

"Nay, go not!" the old man pleaded. "Is it so much to ask—a piece of paper?"

"The demand is just," put in a soldier, looking on. "Moreover, Hasan, thou must go with him before the *cadi*."

"Be silent, O Rashîd, O wicked joker!" snapped the sheykh of the masons crossly. "Meddle not in business that does not concern thee. The *cadi*, forsooth! The *cadi* means more money than the price itself. The buyer would be mad to ask it; since he must pay the fees, I will not pay them."

"I ask the paper only."

"Who has paper?"

"I have!" cried one of the confederates, and produced a fragment.

"A pen? Hast thou a pen?"

"Catch—a lead pencil!"

"Well, let us see. Bismillah—canst thou read, old man?"

"Never a word, O my brother."

"Capital!"

The sheykh of the builders laid the bit of paper flat on his left hand, and wrote with the pencil on it hastily. Rashîd, the soldier who had once before interrupted, drew near and read aloud over the rascal's shoulder:

"'Praise be to Allah, who made some men asses.' That is all that he has written, O my lord the buyer. Reflect, I advise thee: is it worth thy money?"

The sheykh of the masons sprang up in a fury and assailed the marplot, who retreated laughing. But

the old man waited patiently upon his heels, smiling as one inured to cruel banter.

"Here is thy paper, O my soul. Now give the money!"

"It is seemly that we first recite the Fat'ha hand in hand——"

"Of course, but afterwards; I know the order. The money first, in my hand here present."

The sheykh of the masons thrust the hand beneath his nose. Cautiously, with hesitations, that old man took a purse out of the bosom of his robe—a leathern bag it was, suspended by a cord around his neck—and, holding it so that no one could observe its contents, picked out coins to the amount stipulated, and dealt them one by one into the seller's hand. No sooner was the tale complete than, with a cry of "Yallah!" the masons snatched up their tools and ran like madmen. In the twinkling of an eye, it seemed, they had vanished in the rising bloom of night; the buyer sat alone, amazed, but smiling.

"They stayed not to recite the Fat'ha!" he observed to the group of soldiers and street-urchins who still watched him, "neither had they the politeness to offer me a cup of coffee."

"Perceivest thou not that they have robbed thee, O my dear!" said Rashîd with compassion for his guilelessness. "That Hasan is a son of sin, none like him! He has got thy money."

"And I have this little house. How, therefore, am I robbed, efendim? Is not this nice house mine to live and die in?"

"May Allah bless thee, for thou art a good old man and simple—much too good for this low world.

Think not I covet the house. It is thine so far as I and all men are concerned, till the English judge comes to live in that fine building. Then he may order it and thee to be removed. The land is his; to hear is to obey."

"Allah is greatest! He is my Protector. The great in every place torment and tease the poor. Nevertheless, I am a Muslim, I resign my cause to God. I and my house are small, we may escape his notice."

"In sh'Allah!" said the soldier with a shrug, as he departed with his comrades. The old man said his prayers, then went into his little house and shut the door. The beggar woman and the group of children went away.

In the morning the new householder was out betimes in the market, buying requisites. Rashîd and another from the police-station, passing the shed at noon, beheld him on the ground before its door, making his meal of bread and onions.

"Do me a kindness, O my father!" called Rashîd. "Show my comrade here the paper which that rascal gave thee for a deed of sale."

"It is not with me," said the old man quickly; as if he suspected the soldier of intent to destroy it and claim the house for himself.

"Remember, it is true what I told thee: 'Praise be to Allah, who made some men asses;' that and nothing else is written."

"So thou sayest."

Rashîd then tried to shake the dotard's faith in the validity of the sale by argument, by heated demonstration, but in vain. His listener still smiled

incredulous. The soldiers surveyed him as a holy marvel.

"Our Lord preserve him!" laughed Rashîd as they went their way. "He is a good, harmless man, and I feel just as if he was my father. In sh'Allah, the judge will spare him and his little house!"

On the following day he went again to the shed, and found its tenant employed in fitting up an awning for the door. A cat moved round him, purring, rubbing her arched back against his calves, his shins.

"She came last night to supper," he told the visitor with childish glee. "She ate with me and slept indoors beside me. Allah has sent her for a blessing. The house is happy with her music."

He stooped to stroke the cat, which rose to butt his hand. Rashîd stayed and helped him with the awning.

The dweller in the shed was soon well known in all the town. Despite his mean appearance, he paid for what he bought in ready money, thus gaining the respect of one who has a hidden store, none knows how plenteous. Yet his only extravagance was the purchase of six petroleum tins, four of which he placed at the four corners of his house, while the two remaining were employed indoors as receptacles, the one for oil, the other for water. His intention, so he told Rashîd, was some day to plant creepers in the outside tins and make his house a bower. As he moved about his small estate, planning and disposing, the cat was always with him, rubbing up against his legs.

One day the judge arrived. Rashîd had warned

the old man of his coming, trying to arouse in him a proper fear of dispossession; but had got no more than: "Allah is greatest; He repays the tyrant!" Still the owner of the little house was standing at his door when the judge drove up to his palace, and made obeisance to his Highness from afar. Rashîd, who had met his Highness at the station and brought on his luggage, as soon as duty permitted, sped to the wooden house.

"I have told him thou art the watchman, the ghafîr belonging to him. Thou art in luck, O my uncle, for now, in sh'Allah, thou wilt keep thy house and he will pay thee wages into the bargain. . . . Walk up and down with thy staff, keep folks from walking on this ground. It is a small thing for thee, and the pay is great."

"By Allah, no, I will not! I am no ghafîr. Allah knows I have toiled enough in life. Now, praise to Him, I have a little money and would live easy till my dying day. Let his Honour employ some needy man to guard his property; I have enough to think of in my own salvation."

"Well, Allah help thee! I have done my best."

The dotard pursued his own way as if the great house had been still unoccupied. When the judge, in passing, wished him a happy day, he returned the salutation kindly but without servility. One morning the great one reined in his horse before the shed door and spoke peremptorily in baby Arabic, ordering that the petroleum tins should be removed, calling them ugly, bad, and sinful. The old man, regarding the command as gross impertinence, made no reply, but, stooping, stroked his cat.

"Dost hear me, O ghafir?"

"I hear thee, O khawāgah!"

The judge rode on, appearing satisfied. But next day he stopped again and, pointing angrily at the petroleum tins, asked why they were still there. His voice, raised high in indignation, carried as far as the police-station. Rashîd came running to protect his aged friend.

"Efendim!" he exclaimed before the judge, bringing his heels together with a click and throwing a hand up to his brow, "the ghafir is deaf. His intelligence is like walled up. An upright man, none better in the town. What is your Excellency's will concerning him?"

"He must remove those tins."

"Upon my head, efendim. It is quickly done."

Rashîd in a trice had put the tins indoors and piled them one upon another in the farthest corner. Their owner offered no resistance, but sat still in the sun before his door, stroking the cat in his lap, and repeating over and over again the statement that he was a Muslim and looked to Allah for redress.

"Of thy kindness, efendim, look upon me as thy servant with respect to him," said Rashîd as he again saluted previous to withdrawal. "If thou hast any will concerning this ghafir, do but send and call me; I will make him understand. He is a good old man. I love him like my father."

The Englishman thanked him kindly, and accepted the proffered service.

It was not long before Rashîd was summoned on more serious business. He found the judge in the verandah of his house, frowning at shells of nuts, at

crumbs of bread, at rags and bits of paper which defiled its floor. A number of people had been sleeping there the night before. Footprints ran all over the unplanted garden.

"What good is thy friend as a ghafîr?" the judge said crossly. "I shall have to dismiss him unless he shows more vigilance. His place is here at my door, not shut up in that shed. That shed must be pulled down, it is ugly. The builders should have moved it when they left. And another thing about the ghafîr, my cook tells me that he has set up a kind of tavern in that shed, sells coffee, and food, and sherbet to the people. It must not be upon my property. Come now with me and talk to the old fool!"

"Hâdir, efendim!" Rashîd was quite aghast at his friend's madness. To set up a tavern, after the incident of the petroleum tins, after all his warnings, was the crown of indiscretion. He felt annoyance, and at the same time a sort of admiration for such saint-like obstinacy. Trusting in Allah to preserve the aged maniac, he accompanied the judge to the shed. There, to be sure, was the fool bringing out a tray with coffee to two men who sat on little stools before his door, playing the taverner. So it was true; the Berberi cook had not lied in his report to the judge.

"What is this, O ghafîr?" shouted his Highness without other salutation. "Why didst thou let those people sleep in my balcony?" He pointed to the crowded footprints on the newly dried-up ground. "Art thou my ghafîr? If so, what mean these marks right past thy door? Dost understand me?"

"I can hear; no need to roar at me," rejoined the

old man quietly. The customers on stools had turned their heads at the first outcry, but after that paid not the slightest heed to what was said, sipping their coffee tranquilly. "I am not a ghafîr, though thou hast called me so. Praise to Allah, I am granted independence; I serve no master in my old age."

"Hearest thou that, O Rashîd? He is no ghafîr; he is not my servant, and he is not deaf."

"O Excellency of the Judge, it is a miracle!" the soldier gasped.

"Listen, O sheykh!" pursued the Englishman. "What right hast thou to keep a coffee-shop without permission? I will not have strange people on my land. I will have this shed pulled down."

"Efendim, let me speak to him; I can make him understand," Rashîd thrust in, forgetting manners in his agitation. Clutching the breast of the old man's robe, he cried:

"Hear, O my uncle! Thou art in luck's way. His Highness intends nothing but kindness and great honour for thee. He appoints thee guardian of his splendid mansion, and will pay thee monthly wages more than thou didst earn in all thy life before. Thou wilt dwell at his door day and night, and take thy toll of all who call upon him."

The old man calmly replied, "I do not wish it. I seek neither gain nor honour, but tranquillity. This is my house, and I will keep to it. Have I troubled his Highness with intrusions? Let him, on his side, cease from vexing me. These honest men are witness how he comes and worries me."

The honest men referred to gave no sign of hear-

ing. Observing that they had finished their coffee, the old man took up the tray and carried it back into the shed.

"What was that he said?" exclaimed the judge in great astonishment. "His house! The house is mine, and I will have him know it. Hi! O ghafîr, O sheykh, come here and listen! Tell me, whose is this little house of wood in which thou dwellest?"

"Wallahi, it is my own!"

"By what right?"

"By the best of rights, the right of purchase."

"Hast thou the title-deeds?"

"I have."

"Then kindly show them."

"Nay, that I will not here and now; it is not seemly. But come with me to-morrow to the Mehkemeh, before the judge, then I will show my paper."

"Show it at once, O ass!" whispered Rashîd fiercely. "Is not he who asks for it the judge in person?"

The old man showed his paper with extreme reluctance.

Slowly the judge spelt it out: "'Praise be to Allah who made some men asses!' This is no title-deed nor record of a sale, O sheykh, but simply a joke some wicked man has played on thee."

"Your Highness is pleased to say so," rejoined the claimant with a smile of much longsuffering. "Rashîd here present has made known to thee his jest at my expense, and thou hast deigned to share it. Thou art great and powerful, I am nothing; thou hast much, I little. It is a shame for thee to

covet my small house of wood of little value, when thou hast that magnificent palace close at hand. But the great were ever thus, grasping, insatiable, eager to defraud the poor. Despoil me if thou wilt; thou hast the power; but seek not to cast doubt upon my title-deed nor to make any show of legality. Such wiles are beneath thee, surely, being rank hypocrisy. And remember Allah is above us both, and in the end He will redress the balance."

"But it is as I tell thee. 'Praise be to Allah, who made some men asses.' That and nothing else is written on this paper. Is it not true, O Rashîd?"

"By Allah, by the Prophet, it is true."

"You make a mock of me; these righteous men are witness! I am a Muslim, and resign my cause to God."

"Efendim, I will tell thee how it is!" cried Rashîd as though enlightened by a sudden guess. "This poor old man—may Allah heal his intelligence!—must have seen the builders moving their implements out of this little shed, and, thinking it would make a house for him, have asked the price. They sold it to him for a joke."

"Shame on them! Tell me where to find those builders."

"Efendim, they have gone their way; who knows their present whereabouts? For myself I know no more than that their foreman was named Hasan. It is in truth a shame, for this is a simple, pious man. I beg, efendim, be not hard on him."

The judge then turned to the offender friendly-wise, and asked:

"O old man, come and be in truth my ghafr, and

guard my big house yonder. Thou shalt eat in my kitchen, and in addition I will pay thee two napoleons every month."

The offer was a handsome one ; Rashîd extolled it ; but the old man shook his head and answered doggedly :

"No, I will not ! I will dwell at peace in my own house."

"But this wooden house, I tell thee, is not thine. It is my property, and in a day or two it will be pulled down. What wilt thou do then ?"

"I shall go my way, giving praise to Allah, as is due, and asking Him to destroy all tyrants who oppress the poor."

"To-morrow, I tell thee, this small house will be destroyed. See, I give thee money, more than it is worth. Come and be my ghafir !"

The other refused the money without glancing at it.

"Nay, O my lord, it is no sale but robbery. O Muslimîn, behold me here, oppressed, despoiled. These two believers can bear witness how the tyrant tried to bribe me, to procure my silence. Had the house been really his, would he have acted thus ? Would he not have haled me forth without parley or politeness ? He has robbed me. My paper—O my paper !"

The judge, convinced of its worthlessness as a legal document, had not bothered to return the scrap of paper. With it crushed in his hand, he was striding back towards the great house. The two customers, who, in his presence, had seemed deaf and blind, directly he was gone, gave tongue to indigna-

tion, cursing his cruel tyranny, and asking Allah to have mercy on a much-wronged man. They stayed with the old man all day and told his story to the passers-by, so that others stopped and tried to console him, murmuring curses on the tyrant. In the three weeks since his coming, he had made himself familiar in the town; greeting every man with childlike friendliness, and boasting the convenience of the little house, which thus became his by common knowledge and repute, the best of titles. When Rashîd next morning came to introduce the workman charged to demolish and pull down the little house, he found his aged protégé the centre of a considerable crowd of angry sympathisers. Seeing a chance of disturbance, he sent for two armed comrades from the police-station. With this support, he set to work to help the old man move his few belongings.

"Where is thy cat?" he asked.

"She forsook me yesterday. She has gone to the kitchen over yonder." He pointed to the white-faced, red-roofed palace. "When she knew I was despoiled, she went over to the tyrant like a child of Adam. Allah is greatest."

The judge came again and offered money to the old man, and also the appointment of ghafîr, but to no purpose; and Rashîd begged him earnestly to withdraw, for the murmurs of the crowd were waxing louder, they were anathematising the oppressor. Rashîd, for conscience, bought the six petroleum tins at a fair price; and at last the dotard, having wrapped his pots and pans up in his bed things, took the bundle on his shoulder, and trudged off down the

road, the crowd escorting him with loud compassion.

A few days later, Rashîd read in a news-sheet from the capital two columns of denunciation of an English judge, who had evicted a poor man from his humble freehold and annexed it wrongfully. Knowing the rights of the story, he laughed loud with his comrades.

"But it is the fault of the English," he felt bound to admit. "They act like common men, not rulers, seeming doubtful of their right; so others doubt it also. A ruler has one word, with force behind it."

x

THE MURDERER

A FULL moon shining through the palm-leaves made strange play of light and darkness on the flat-roofed houses, growing one out of another, which made the village seem a fungus-growth within the grove, as Idrîs, the hired assassin, stole softly to the dwelling of the Sheykh Ferîd. An owl kept hooting near at hand. No owl but hoots if she beholds a murderer. Idrîs was used to her harsh cries of disapproval; but, being religious, would have deemed himself accursed had he omitted the proper formula to avert their omen. He repeated it now.

At the Sheykh Ferîd's door he coughed, and then exclaimed, "O great Protector!"

By this pious invocation of the Most High, his presence was made known to those within. The door was opened by the Sheykh Ferîd in person, saying :

"Is it thou, O Idrîs? Do us the kindness! Enter! Honour us!"

Idrîs was too experienced in his profession to presume on the advantage which the shameful nature of his business gave him with superiors. A novice would have taken liberties; Idrîs refused a seat on the divan, and remained standing reverently

before the conspirators, who were the Sheykh Ferîd and his two brothers, all old men. Idrîs was not yet thirty. He was what is called in lower Egypt a "shûshâni," that is to say, half negro, half Egyptian. His broad, thick-lipped face would have had the negro's childish friendliness had it not been for an angry scar upon the forehead. That wound he had inflicted with his own hand and with prayer, to impart the ferocity needed for success in business. With eyes downcast, he waited for his lords to speak.

His reverence appeared to irk the Sheykh Ferîd, who moved the Frankish lamp upon a stool or low table, which was the only movable the room contained, and cleared his throat repeatedly before beginning :

"Listen, O Idrîs. Thou art like a son of my house, and I speak freely to thee. This is why I sent for thee : There dwells in this village a vile malefactor, whose presence is a poisoned wind in all our faces. He grows in pride with every day. He despises my authority as omdeh, and yesterday refused me salutation. I require of thee no crime, but a good deed. What sayest thou ?"

Idrîs made a gesture of deprecation. "What is his name ?" he inquired.

Again the Sheykh Ferîd moved the lamp, looking down upon the floor, then glancing at his brothers interrogatively. The greybeards nodded ; seeing which, he said :

"His name is Muhammad abû Hassan."

"I seek refuge in Allah !"

"I will pay thee thirty pounds."

"Nay, O my lord, it is too dangerous. To kill a

man of the village where one lives is dangerous ; and it is never done. Moreover, the faction of the Sheykh Muhammad is a strong one, and I fear their vengeance."

"Son of a dog!" cried out the Sheykh Ferîd. "Art thou also of that faction, that thou refuseth a good offer? By Allah Most High and His Apostle, thou shalt hang. I know how thou didst kill that man at Kafr Adas, and can find witnesses. Am I not here the omdeh, and to be obeyed?"

"Am I not thy slave?" replied Idrîs. "Nevertheless my case is hard, at your Honour's mercy."

"Well, then, I will give thee forty pounds, of which ten now in advance."

"Efendim, it is the custom to pay half beforehand."

"His demand is reasonable. Let him have the half," said one of the old men, brothers of the Sheykh Ferîd, producing as he spoke a purse.

Idrîs, having received his fee, withdrew politely. He responded not at all to the jokes and caresses of his employers. Putting on his slippers at the door, he sighed :

"O Giver of Victory, O All-knowing, O Beneficent, O Merciful, O Allah and my parents, approve!"—the common prayer of men embarking upon serious business.

Back in his own house, he found his wife awake and on her feet, carrying to and fro the baby, which was crying. When Idrîs took the child from her, its wail at once subsided. The woman, with a sigh of thankfulness, lay down again.

"What fortune?" she inquired.

"As black as pitch!" replied her husband sadly.

"I am ordered to slay a righteous man—our neighbour in this village. Just when I had bought some land, and settled nicely. My employer is a devil, and he knows my history. He has sworn to have me hanged if I should fail him. O Allah, show me some way out of it! My wit is dead to-night."

"Is the money much?"

"Not much, for such a deed."

"And the cause of hatred?"

"Envy—always envy! No sooner has a man grown rich than he perceives one richer with the eye of rivalry, which leads to hate. May Allah Most High destroy the house of Envy, for it is the cause of all the wickedness in Masr. I seek refuge in Allah from Satan the Stoned."

He laid the baby, now asleep, beside the woman, and, squatting down upon his heels, sighed desperately.

"Listen, O Idrîs!" his wife said presently. "Canst thou not go to the victim and put fear on him—thou, who hast the trick of making men afraid—and persuade him to fly to hiding for a time? Thus thou mayst obtain the credit for his death, and also time wherein to sell thy piece of land."

"Praise be to Allah!" cried Idrîs. "It is good counsel. I must work at once."

He passed out again and crept in the shadow of mud walls till he came to a space clear of palm-trees as of houses, which divided the village into two unequal parts. Beyond it, in the grove, the dwellings of the Sheykh Muhammad abû Hasan and his adherents looked like large anthills. In the middle of this glade, upon the dustheaps, were gathered the

village watchmen, twelve in all, nursing their staves and talking in low tones.

"Attest the Unity!" they cried in concert, springing to their feet, as Idrîs appeared before them suddenly.

"There is no god save God, and Muhammad is the Apostle of God! Have no fear, O my brothers! It is I, Idrîs."

"We have no fear of thee, old devil. In other places thou art feared enough," their leader answered. "Eblîs himself is kindly to his own. Whither away?"

"To the house of a comrade over yonder."

"Thou must be brave to walk alone at night."

They sat down once more upon the dustheaps, while Idrîs went on to the dwelling of the Sheykh Muhammad. There, leaning to the crack of the door, he called upon the sheykh by name, at first softly, then with fierce impatience, so loudly that the dogs began to bark.

"Who cries out there?" exclaimed a voice at length.

"By Allah, a friend, charged with an errand which concerns thy life. Art thou alone, O sheykh? For none must hear us."

"Thy name is what?"

"Idrîs the murderer, saving thy presence. But have no fear, I come in kindness. I am unarmed. By the Prophet, if thou hear me not, thy fate is sealed."

"Swear by thy salvation not to harm me or my house."

"By my life, I swear it."

The door was opened by the Sheykh Muhammad,

a small, grey-bearded man, with shrewd black eyes, holding in his hand a lighted candle. He had doffed his fez and turban for the night, and wore in their stead a close, white skull-cap.

Having ascertained that no one else could hear—for the house was a grand one, boasting four good rooms—Idrîs explained his errand to the sheykh, who, as he listened, had a fit of ague.

“So I must kill thee—I could kill thee now, left-handed, armed as thou art”—Idrîs glanced scornfully at the pistol in the sheykh’s belt,—“unless thou come to terms at once with me.” As it were distractedly, he made a clutching gesture, which brought his fingers within reach of his companion’s throat. The trick was done; the fear was put on him. The Sheykh Muhammad shrank in abject terror.

“I give thee fifty pounds to spare my life.”

Idrîs extended his mud-coloured left hand—he kept the right for honourable dealing—and, tapping its palm, said bluntly :

“Put !”

“I will go and fetch the money. Have no fear !”

“Fear !” scoffed the murderer, and remained chuckling all the while his host was gone.

The money in his pouch, he changed his tone for one of deference.

“Now deign to listen, O my lord, while I, thy slave, instruct thee what to do. There is but one way for thee to escape death ; it is by flight immediately. If thou remain in the village, I must kill thee ; or thy enemy will have me hanged. Thou, who art a lover of the poor, consider me, a poor man, in this sore dilemma. A month’s retirement will not hurt your

honour, while it will save my life, and give me time to sell my land and leave the district."

"Agreed, I will take leave of my dear ones, and fly with the first light."

"May thy house be destroyed! Wouldst thou secure my ruin?" Idrîs became once more savage. "Thou wouldst tell thy wives, thy sons, and have the story known to the whole world? Fly at once, this minute, or, by the Lord, I kill thee!"

That was enough. The murderer himself procured a mule and, mounting the sheykh upon it, led him forth, walking for many miles across the plain. At dawn, in a region where he was not known, Idrîs, with pious blessings, turned and left him.

Relieved of awe by his departure, the Sheykh Muhammad recovered the use of his wits, and rode straight for the chief town of the province, intending to lay his case before an English inspector.

Idrîs returned to his house about the fourth hour of the morning, and slept until the third hour after noon. He then arose and broke his fast, before repairing to the omdeh's house.

The Sheykh Ferîd was busy when Idrîs entered. The latter took a low seat and abode his turn. When everyone was gone except the two old brothers—

"It is finished," he exclaimed dramatically, drawing his left hand sharp across his throat.

"Good," observed the Sheykh Ferîd, so carelessly that Idrîs, alarmed, was moved to state his claim.

"Where are the twenty pounds, in kindness, O my lord?"

The Sheykh Ferîd surveyed him very haughtily.

"What mean these words, O insolent? Come not here with thy demands, O lacking in manners! I know nothing of thee or thy deeds."

"But thou didst swear before two witnesses here present."

"Thy speech is strange to us," replied the brothers.

The omdeh added angrily : "[Begone immediately and mend thy manners, or, by the Prophet, I will have thee hanged."

Such bad faith was a new thing to Idrîs, who, up till now, had always met with liberality from his employers. Horror getting the better of his habitual servility, and disgust at such treatment maddening, he called the three sheykhs atheists and pledge-breakers, and with a torrent of malediction turned his back.

A few steps from the door he saw what he had done, and burst out weeping. He had offended the small tyrant of the village, who had power to make his daily life a hell. Yet his cause was just; the omdeh had behaved iniquitously. Where was justice, where was conscience here in Egypt? Surely nowhere but in the credulous imagination of the poor murderer! Stumbling along the narrow paths between the hovels, blind with grief and indignation, he cried to One Above for succour, and asked all true believers to attest his wrongs.

"O Muslimîn!" he howled. "Oppressed! Oppressed! I, a Muslim, am oppressed most sorely. May Allah make an end of tyrants, contract-breakers! The omdeh has sworn to persecute me, only because I claimed my just due. He is great, I

little. What help for me, my masters, under Allah ? See me ruined !”

At these cries the hovels poured forth their inhabitants. Idrîs was caught and held by friendly questioners and, when it was clearly known that he had right on his side, was led out to the dustheaps where was space for gathering. There the mob resolved itself into a council—a process not unheard of in Egyptian villages—in which the poorest and most insignificant, even small boys and women, had the right to speak—a council whose decisions, wise or foolish, are redoubtable. It was agreed on all hands that the omdeh had behaved abominably. The hottest lovers of the Sheykh Ferîd cried shame on him. A deputation was appointed to rebuke him, saying :

“This true believer had a contract with thee, to rid thee of thy enemy for a certain sum. He did rid thee of thy enemy, yet thou withholdest half the wage. He is a simpleton, a truth-teller, by no means clever like your honour. The whole village is incensed at such conduct. Thy face is blackened, with the faces of us, thy adherents. Pay him the money quickly, that men may praise thy name as heretofore.”

But the business of the deputation was forestalled by the omdeh, who had heard of the formation of the court, and feared its judgment, appearing on the scene of conclave with his two old brothers. A woman shouted, “Shame on thee, O sheykh !” and the cry was taken up on all the hillocks. “He did what he was hired to do—he slew the enemy. Pay him the twenty pounds which thou still owest !”

“What means this talk ? The man has lied to you.

My quarrel with him is a trifle not worth mentioning. He demanded rudely, and with insult, a sum which I had promised him in bounty. See, I am come to pay it—it is nought to me—to put a stop to this commotion in the village.”

Someone near enough to hear this raised the shout: “He pays!” whereat a roar of satisfaction rose.

The Sheykh Ferîd went up to Idrîs and told the gold into his hand ostentatiously, whispering :

“Thou art cleverer than I am. But remember, I know nothing of this talk of killing. I promised thee the money in pure kindness.”

But the murderer, beyond the reach of hints in his excitement, supposing that his right was called in question, cried :

“A gift, thou sayest? Canst thou deny that thou didst summon me last night——”

“Be silent, madman, liar, ass!” the old sheykh screamed; but Idrîs, infuriated by such epithets, spat at him, and called out :

“O Muslimîn, hear the whole truth. Last night he paid me money to assassinate the Sheykh Muhammad abû Hasan——”

At that name there arose a violent disturbance. Though Idrîs continued speaking, he was quite unheard.

“It is true. He is missing. He cannot be found. One came in the night and fetched him, it is said. God give us vengeance on the men who slew him,” cried the partisans of the Sheykh Muhammad; while lovers of the Sheykh Ferîd declared it was no matter.

The court of ready law was turned into a faction-fight.

The women alone were undivided; and these rushed with one accord upon Idrîs, who then knew fear. His great strength helped him not at all against them. Did he lift a hand they cried: "Aye, kill us, do!—weak women! O thou hero!—Thou shalt see, we will tear thee in pieces, O miscreant, who slew his neighbour, a good righteous man, for gold! May Allah blast thee for attacking friends and neighbours!"

"Listen!" he wept at last, as some began to claw him. "Allah witness, I am most innocent of all men living. The Sheykh Muhammad is alive this minute. I am a poor pious man, no devil. I saved his life by a stratagem—at great peril to myself; for the omdeh hates me, and had sworn to hang me if I failed."

"Then thou hast not earned the money which we made him pay."

"Yes, yes, by Allah—yes, so far as he knew! He believes that I have killed the Sheykh Muhammad. It was, therefore, wicked of him to refuse to pay me."

"True; the right is with thee."

Idrîs had come to this point in his contest with the women, and began to see that he must forthwith change his place of residence; the rival factions of Muhammad and Ferîd were joining battle close at hand among the dustheaps, when a ghafir came running out from the village with loud cries of "News." He sped to the omdeh and conferred with him. The tidings spread like fire: a great one of the government was close at hand; and the villagers had not recovered from their consternation at this

rumour ere the said great one appeared—an Englishman on horseback, clad in a white suit and a broad white hat, followed by ten mounted policemen. Idrîs, forgotten in this new excitement, mingled with the crowd, bent nearly double to disguise his stature. He heard men say the omdeh was arrested.

“So it is certain that he did assassinate the Sheykh Muhammad.”

“No; he still denies it vigorously, calling Our Lord to witness.”

Idrîs pressed onward, eager to learn for himself. At length he was so close to the Englishman that he could hear the jingle of his horse's bit above the clamour. He was sidling nearer yet, in hopes to overhear his conversation with the Sheykh Ferîd, when a shout of praise to Allah rent the air. Springing upright for a moment, he beheld the Sheykh Muhammad emerging from the village on his mule.

“It is himself,” was cried on all hands. “He is alive—Muhammad abû Hasan.”

The Sheykh Ferîd forgot discretion in astonishment. In a terrible voice, he shouted: “O Idrîs, O clever devil, where art thou? Come hither; give me back my forty pounds!”

The cry was heard afar. The Englishman laughed loudly, and remarking, “Out of thy own mouth, O sheykh,” had him arrested. The amusement of the crowd of villagers dawned slowly, after the manner of appreciations which will last for ever; but in five minutes men were helpless on the ground with laughter, girls were dancing madly, giving forth their joy-cries.

“Hear, O people!” said the Englishman in

intelligible Arabic, when the uproar had in some degree subsided. "Are you not ashamed of your most wretched state? It is this day seen how the hired assassin is the king among you, extorting gold from whom he will; sparing, killing at his royal pleasure. And why? Because he is the best among you, the one man brave and resolute amid a host of cowards, little children. . . ."

Idrîs stayed to hear no more. With a sob of thanksgiving, he fled to his own house, and told his wife the government had done him justice and exalted the poor murderer. He bade her prepare at once for departure, and helped her make their few effects into a bundle.

When the Englishman rode forth from the village an hour later, a little behind his escort, having stayed to light a pipe, Idrîs was waiting for him by the nearest sakieh. His wife, the bundle on her head, the baby in her arms, was there behind him. The murderer ran out and kissed the horseman's boot.

"What is thy errand to me?" asked the latter.

"Efendim, I am thy slave till death, for the sake of those kind words thou spakest but now concerning me. Let me but follow thee, and be thy servant. By Allah, I will guard thee like a lion."

"I do not understand. I do not know thee. Say, who art thou?"

"Efendim, may it please thee, I am that poor murderer whom, of thy kindness, thou didst call the best of men. May Our Lord reward your Excellency for praising me thus nobly in the ears of all—me, who am of the race of the poor despised, whose good deeds, whose piety, men are wont to overlook. I have

done ill deeds, efendim, but always by compulsion and never without the proper prayers to God for pardon. I never neglected my religious duties, as many who cry shame on me do daily. Efendim, I implore thee, let me go with thee. I am a good man, to be trusted. I am ruined here. These people do not understand things like your Honour."

"What canst thou do?" the horseman asked good-humouredly. "Canst groom a horse, or cook, or wait at table?"

"Efendim, no; but I can put thy fear on people. That is my business: to make men afraid."

"And thou knowest all the rascals, all the malcontents, and, if occasion rose, could lay your hand on them."

"Efendim, yes! And I will serve thee truly."

The inspector thought a moment.

"Well, be it so!" he said at length with a laugh. "That is a great gift—to put fear on people. Come, and we will see what we can make of thee."

Idris stooped down and kissed the rider's stirrup, giving praise to Allah for this high preferment. Calling to his wife, he started on the dusty tramp along the dyke-path. He wept tears of pride. Thenceforth he was a member of the government.

THE TALE OF A CAMP

“WHAT is thy opinion of them?”

“The chief one, the big hypocrite, is very filthy.”

Ibrahîm the cook questioned Shibli the dragoman in the kitchen-tent where they squatted while the dinner was a-cooking. Outside, a level space with rocks and tufts of grass extended to a ruined arch, within which gushed a spring; beyond that was a graveyard, then a flat-roofed village, and then a barren hill quite black against the twilight sky. Smooth stones in the foreground still gleamed wanly; the air immediately around their fire seemed tinted violet; the flames leapt up, deep orange, like a flower. The camp had come out three days from Jerusalem; yet the dragoman and the other attendants were still uncertain what kind of people were the tourists whom they served.

“Filthy—a true word!” said Amîn the waiter.

“I knew what to expect,” the dragoman pursued with scorn. “Jûnas always gives me filthy ones for the last of the season, that they report ill of me, and so he may avoid paying me the ten pounds extra promised if I do well. I have had enough of him. I shall apply for work with Kûk. To-day the big hypocrite made me leave the straight road twice

vexatiously, in order to visit places of no interest, with the result that we came late to the camping-place, and the horses are half dead."

"And when you did arrive," put in the cook, "he made us move the tents just twenty yards for caprice merely. May there spring up a gale in the night and lay them flat, since he spurned the place of shelter which we had selected!"

The muleteers came in from baiting and watering their beasts. Having deposited their sacks of chaff and barley, they squatted down and joined the conversation. "He is one of those whom you can never please," observed their sheykh. "In his madness, this morning when we started out, he made me loose the girth of a packsaddle, with the result that, after a bit, the load slipped round and nearly killed the mule. May Allah grant him endless pain hereafter!"

"What is his profession?" asked Amin the waiter.

"Hast thou no eyes nor ears? He is a priest, though in disguise," said the dragoman.

"Aye. I guessed that. But there are different sorts of priests among the English. Some are rich and generous, others filthy."

"Well, he is of the filthiest—a missionary from Uganda. I overheard the ladies saying so."

"Ugh!" came in disgust from all the circle.

"Then there will be no bakhshîsh," observed the cook with a wry face. He clicked his thumbnail on his two front teeth, and therewith spat disconsolately.

"Yes, he is a missionary," pursued the dragoman. "And, having dwelt among the savages of Africa, believes he knows the way to manage us poor

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Syrians. We are the same as blacks, it seems: we live and learn! We must be kept in perpetual fear; we must never be allowed to do anything right; lest the knowledge thereof should breed complacency, which in such base natures is the same as impudence; we cannot know anything; we must defer to our white master. He says repeatedly to the three ladies and the stout khawâjah: 'Let me manage—I understand these beebles.' May his house be destroyed!"

"Could anything be filthier?" the cook suspired. "What are we to do, O Shibli?"

The dragoman hung his head as one world-weary. "I must think," he said.

He thought, with knees drawn up to meet his chin, while the cook and Amîn were busy with the dinner of the tourists; and the swarthy muleteers looked on concernedly. But when the council was resumed, he had invented nothing.

"What are we to do?" sighed Amîn. "Just now, when I started round the table one way, he cried in wrath, and made me go the other. The curse of God on the religion of his father!"

He too assumed the posture of the dragoman, lowering his brow and drawing up his knees to meet his chin.

Silence ensued.

For every son of the Arabs it is the first necessity, whether by fair means or guile, to win the favour of his employer for the time being. Where all means fail, his limbs refuse their motion, and he sits and scowls, forlorn. The alternatives then presented to his understanding are either to deceive the blockhead

and so get the laugh of him, or else to run away. The whole assembly in the cook's tent, from the resplendent dragoman to the most ragged muleteer, were now upon the horns of this dilemma; and, flight all together being quite impracticable, were seeking how to make sport of the English missionary from Uganda.

"He is mad; may his limbs all wither!" muttered Shibli the dragoman, first to break the silence.

"May Allah balk him of his heart's desire!" exclaimed the cook.

The muleteers each added to the curse.

All of a sudden, as they growled dejectedly, Amîn the waiter lifted up his head, and laughed:

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

"What is it, O Amîn?"

"Oh, ho, ho, ho!" Amîn slid down upon his back, and lay convulsed. The others flung themselves upon him, smote him, questioned him, endeavouring to drag him up and learn the matter. It was some minutes ere they heard distinctly:

"Ha, ha! He, he! Let us be all he thinks! For the love of Allah, let us be the filthiest of human idiots! Oho! He is accustomed to bad servants—ah, I see it!—he does not know good servants when he finds them. He must be teaching everyone. O Shibli, O 'brahîm, O every Muslim, every Christian present, for the love of my old beard, be fools henceforward! . . . O Lord of heaven and earth! O Holy Miriam!"

The laughter became general as the thought grew clear in every mind. Amîn's intelligence was praised on all hands.

"By Allah!" exclaimed the cook, "I am absolutely

ignorant of Frankish cooking. I am his Honour's poor disciple. He must teach me."

"And I," gasped Amin between the spasms of creative mirth, "shall be so nervous—O, so nervous!—when I wait at table. I shall appeal to him for instruction at every turn."

"Behold me such a stricken fool!" laughed Shibli, "as not to know when I am not wanted. In sh'Allah, I shall spoil his courtship of the fair young lady!"

The chief of the muleteers, a dirty greybeard, here laughed out. "As for me," he declared, "I swear by the Prophet, they shall have no sleep this night."

The three superiors—dragoman, cook, and waiter—had their beds in the kitchen tent. They slept peacefully; but the muleteers, who lay among their beasts, kept wide awake. Among the baggage-animals were several donkeys, which the rascals by a trick compelled to bray at frequent intervals. At length the voice of the big hypocrite was heard calling from the mouth of the tent which he shared with the stout khawâjah. At once the five muleteers sprang up and ran to him, knuckling sleepy eyes, and talking all together. He had no Arabic to speak of; they no English. After a deal of altercation, they perceived his meaning suddenly, and all rushed headlong on the only donkey which happened at that time to be performing. It is the simplest feat to stop a donkey's braying; you have merely to pull his tail down hard and hold it, and the brazen voice dies instantly in sobs. To hang a weight upon the tail is to secure silence.

But no sooner had the clergyman gone back to bed than the noise broke out afresh. Four times did the

hypocrite come forth with shouts of anger, while voices from the ladies' tent called out in anguish ; and at each fresh call the sleepy muleteers experienced the same difficulty in understanding. At length, towards dawn they thought it best to rouse the upper servants. Shibli, heavy with sleep, could not apprehend at first the matter of complaint. Amîn stepped in before him, asking :

“What the bother, sir?”

“Can't they find some way to stop that awful noise—those donkeys braying? None of us have slept a wink. The ladies will be quite unfit to ride this morning.”

Amîn conferred a moment with the chief muleteer. “He say he cut their tongues out, if you order, sir! He your serfant, same as all of us. He kill those beastlies dead to gif you bleasure.”

“No, No! The foolish man! Tell him on no account to be so cruel!”

Shibli, by this time awake, here thrust Amîn aside, exclaiming :

“Dear sir, I'm fery sad you woke this night. It will not habben again. They make such noise all account of one dam little herb grows in this blace.”

There was some delay at setting out that morning. Though the tents and baggage had been some time loaded up, though the travellers had finished breakfast and were ready to mount, the train of mules still waited ; whereas their custom was to gain what start they might, their rate of progress being slower than a horse's pace.

“What are they waiting for?” shouted the big hypocrite, his large, rosy face, with red moustache

and prominent grey eyes devoid of lashes, shaded at the moment by a solar topee and a puggaree. Shibli the dragoman hurried up with suppliant mien.

"The muleteer, he wish you see the loads all right ; he say you know his business better than what he do. He only wish you habby and be blease with him." Shibli was half ashamed of his own impudence.

"Oh, yes. Quite right," the Frank replied. "I'll come at once." He then went over to the line of mules and examined every load with seeming care.

"You been a muleteer, sir?" Amîn could not forbear the sneer as he looked on.

"Ha ha! No, not exactly ; but you'll find there isn't much I don't know when it comes to travelling in these countries."

The heaven-sent fool received the insult as a compliment. His simplicity was clearly seen even by the muleteers, who, though ignorant of English, had no difficulty in interpreting the cook's broad grin.

The dragoman thought Amîn had gone too far. To counteract the rudeness, he kissed the hypocrite's hand, then pressed it to his brow, exclaiming :

"I'm your serfant, sir. You tell me what to do, I do it. At first I thought you was a common traf'ler, I done wrong. Now I see you know a thing or two, I'm broud to serf you !"

When Shibli had performed his part, Amîn did homage in like manner, so did Ibrahîm, and then the muleteers with shouts of acclamation. The fool beamed on them ; there was even a glisten of tears in his eyes as he exclaimed :

"There, there, my men! Now we understand

each other. No shirking, no deceit! Be fair to me, and I'll be fair to you."

He strode back towards the other tourists with pride, announcing: "I've got them into shape. We understand each other. They'll give no further trouble."

The ladies of the party were a tough old maiden, sister to the stout khawâjah; a widowed lady, who travelled in a palanquin between two mules, and regarded the tour in the light of a dangerous illness; and the daughter of this last, a pretty, fair-haired girl, between whom and the big hypocrite there was attraction. They and the gentlemen all wore white, as if in duty bound, making the dragoman's gorgeous clothes the more conspicuous. Shibli had two objects on that morning's ride: to let the missionary do the work of guide and general servant to the party, and to interrupt all talk between the lovers. In both he succeeded with a colour of the greatest innocence.

When they reached the spot where Amîn was waiting with the luncheon-hamper, they found that he had not yet unpacked anything.

"I wait for you, sir," he informed the missionary from Uganda, "to see if you like this blace. We easy change it."

"Oh, hang it all!" exclaimed the stout khawâjah, who was ravenous. "Why can't you, Pearson, leave the men alone? They did all right till you got meddling with them."

Amîn and Shibli exchanged lightning glances. It was almost the first utterance they had heard from the stout khawâjah, and it gave them a respect for

his intelligence. But the missionary ignored it, smiling on Amîn.

"That's right," he said. "Quite right to wait and ask before unpacking."

Amîn bowed low in gratitude for this approval; and then, in the simplest manner, with a mien of great abashment, beguiled the simpleton into setting out the lunch himself, while he, the waiter, watched as one instructed.

That night, around the camp-fire, the servants waxed uproarious, their laughter spreading to a group of ragged, staring fellahîn. "He likes it! By Allah Most High, he loves us as pure idiots! Go on! Go on! He will feel foolish in the end."

But though on each succeeding day fresh tricks were played, some of them so bold that Shibli trembled in his riding-boots, the big hypocrite continued well content. It was the stout khawâjah who grumbled; seeing which the men took care that he personally should have nothing to complain of.

"By Allah, he alone has intellect!" Amîn declared. "He says 'damn!' where 'damn!' is needed. But the ladies scold him. What shame, they say, to curse kind Mister Bearson, who takes such trouble to make things go right."

Even when, by the contrivance of a muleteer, his luggage was precipitated down a rocky slope, two hundred feet, into a torrent-bed, the missionary arriving on the scene, said only: "Dear, dear! How annoying!" The muleteers were all in tears; they had been waiting an hour for the treat of watching his behaviour.

"It's your own fault, Pearson," growled the stout

khawâjah, "for interfering with the way they load. The men know their own business. Why can't you let 'em alone?"

The missionary cast about for some way to recover his two portmanteaux, and his Gladstone bag ; which last had burst open in its passage down the rocks, scattering its store of personalia. He declared it would be easy to get down and fetch them. The servants swore by Allah it was quite impossible. Egged on to prove his point, that prince of fools at length himself descended, collecting his belongings as he sprang from rock to rock. It was quite easy, he called up with pride, and scrambled back, the bag upon his shoulder. Reassured by his performance, two muleteers leapt down like goats and brought up the portmanteaux.

"Where there's a will, there's a way!" panted the missionary, mopping his brow and gazing round him with complacency.

"How brave of you!" the ladies cried. "In this terrific heat!"

Amîn the waiter leaned to Shibli's ear. "I shall go mad," he whispered. "It is more than flesh can bear. O Lord, have mercy on me! My brain aches!"

When they halted for the night he repeated aloud his statement that he must go mad or expire immediately.

Then, with creative laugh, he changed the tense, exclaiming:

"I will go mad—like Neby Daûd, when he wanted to deceive his enemies! I must have the freedom of apparent madness for an hour, or die this night."

The others gaping on him, he enlarged his meaning.

"Well, do it thoroughly," the dragoman enjoined. "Give not a hint of sanity, or we are ruined!"

Amîn allowed a strangeness to appear in his demeanour while waiting on the travellers that night at dinner; and then, as soon as he had cleared the table, he tore off all his clothes and, shrieking, danced stark naked round the fire. Shibli ran for the missionary.

"O sir! O sir! Come, bray! We're in such trouble. Something dreadful habben to Amîn. He's mad, sir!"

The fool rushed forth. "Back! back!" he cried to the ladies, who pressed after him. The stout khawâjah went to help should strength be needed. They held the madman, who soon gave up struggling. He seized an end of the missionary's red moustache, and tweaked it, as a slobbering baby might, grinning insanely in its owner's face. He was carried to the missionary's own bed, and there attended. The camp was at Mejd-el-esh-Shems, below Mount Hermon. There was no doctor within twenty miles. The travellers were in despair, till the cook assured them:

"That soon bass ofer, sir. He's kind o' boisoned, sir, by eatin' of a little thing what grow about here. I tell him not to, but he will. The madness only last an hour or two. Blease God he soon be well, sir."

"He's fast asleep now," the stout khawâjah, coming from the tent, reported.

"He be all right to-morrow, neffer fear!" said Shibli cheerfully.

But when the next day came, Amîn was found too weak to move a limb. After a long discussion, it was arranged that he should occupy the palanquin, the widow lady, in the strength of pity, consenting to affront the perils of a donkey-ride. The dragoman scowled at the decision, but his lips were sealed before the English. He cursed Amîn's religion and parentage as he passed the tent where he lay; and pinched him spitefully when helping bear him to the litter. More than once upon the morning's march he rode back as if to ascertain the sufferer's state; really to mutter:

"Out, O ancient malefactor! Are we here to wait on thee, O child of devils!"

A sweet voice answered:

"Allah! I am comfortable. How sweet to take one's ease while others labour."

The boy in charge of the mules which bore the palanquin fed the invalid with chickpease and with monkey-nuts, in return for mirth-provoking grins between the curtains.

"But arise, O evil joker! This cannot go on. While thou art ill, I have to do thy work as well. By Allah, thou hadst better get well quickly, or I will take a stick and beat thee near to death," cried Shibli, past all patience, in the afternoon.

"In mercy, O my dearest, be not wroth with me," the rogue replied. "Repose is sweet, and I am deep in love. The old one, the widow, trembles when I kiss her hand in gratitude. O desire! O rapture! As for the work, beloved, do as I do! Persuade a

horse to kick thee, and go lame. The big hypocrite is such a filthy ass, he will believe thee!"

There was no way of making Amîn work again, short of beating, to which Shibli did not wish to have recourse, for they were friends. He took the rascal's hint, and limped that evening. The missionary asked what ailed him.

"Oh, it's nothing, sir!" His face was wrung with pain while he thus spoke. "That dam horse o' mine—he's fery naughty, sir—he kick my shin, that's all."

The ladies cried out in compassion; the stout khawâjah went into his tent and fetched some ointment. Shibli was forbidden to wait at dinner. The missionary himself laid the table and took the dishes from the cook's hands. Next day Amîn was still extremely weak, and Shibli's lameness was evident the minute he set foot to ground. The cook then discovered something, "which blayed hell in his inside," and made it an excuse for working languidly. The muleteers too started ailments, and were lazy; but still the missionary smiled on them all, since they deferred to him. It was a tribe of invalids that brought that party of tourists into Damascus, where the camp broke up.

The muleteers, the cook, and the waiter were paid off. Shibli the dragoman alone remained on duty, it being part of his service to escort the travellers to Beyrout, where they were to take ship. A single visit to a doctor in Damascus had, he assured them, quite dispelled his lameness. Amîn and the cook, the former likewise whole again, went down in the same train to Beyrout, on their way to Jaffa. Shibli

joining them in their compartment, there was much laughter as they reviewed the wondrous journey.

"But all is not yet complete!" Amîn insisted. "He does not know how daintily we fooled him. We must not tell him plainly, I suppose. But let us devise a parting speech of such absurdity, that, hearing it, he may see cause to doubt our previous gravity. By Allah, we must sow misgiving in his mind, for a farewell blessing."

"Aye, why not?" agreed Shibli with a shrug. "I care not though he take offence, for my part. He will complain of me to Jûnas, that is all; and Jûnas will withhold from me the ten pounds he promised. He would find a pretext to do that in any case; he is such a rascal, and he hates me so. I will not work for him another year. He gives me all the refuse of the travellers. Come, let us set to work at once, and compose the speech."

They put their heads together and devised the following:

"Great sir, we grief to say goodbye to you; you are so cleffer. We think you are the clefferest man was effer seen. If we not know for sure God made the world, we think you made it, sir; you're such a cleffer deffil! We thank you fery much for showin' us our business; that safed us lots of trouble. You'd make a good cam'-serfant, sir; you take such bains combarred with what we do. Amîn he soon forget to wait at table; the muleteers they soon forget to load the mules. You come back soon, sir, teach us all again. We can't do nothin' without you to tell us. God bless you, sir, and Mr Fenner and

the ladies. We neffer had such a jolly good time in all our lifes."

This oration was delivered in due course by Shibli, as spokesman of a deputation which approached the travellers as they sat in the spacious upper hall of Bassoul's Hotel in Beyrout. The audience, to the speaker's grief, appeared enraptured. Only the stout khawâjah, Mr Venner, looked strangely on the servile trio; and he seemed not displeased. He hated Pearson. As for the missionary from Uganda, that amazing simpleton rose up solemnly and replied to the address. There were tears in his eyes.

"Thank you, my men," he said with voice half-choked, "and may God bless you! We've had a pleasant time together; and I, for one, am never likely to forget it; since I must tell you I have won a bride since we set forth"—Amîn here cried "Hooray," and clapped his hands—"Yes, I have won a charming bride, and shall look back always on this tour through Palestine with affection, as the time when I received God's greatest blessing. You have behaved very well. A few little differences we had at first. You thought me just a common tourist who could be deceived. You found out your mistake, and then we understood each other. All went smoothly after that. I am highly gratified by this free expression of your goodwill. Once more, God bless you—and—goodbye."

He dwelt upon the last word mournfully. Then there was giving of bakhshîsh by all the party. The stout khawâjah said in Shibli's ear: "You're a cheeky rascal. But I must say he deserved it. Here's something for you."

The sums received were greater than could have been expected, judging from the appearance of the party. Even Amín's hard heart was a little mollified by this circumstance. "Allah is greatest!" he remarked to Shibli with a shrug. "Fools have their uses: may Our Lord increase them!"

TRA-LA-LA!

So many charitable and religious foreign agencies have, of late years, opened mission schools in the Lebanon, attracted by its fine scenery and agreeable climate, that any Christian native of those parts whose children are not educated free of charge has only his own bigotry to blame. The youths, thus trained, betake themselves to Egypt, to western Europe, or to America, and return with money in the pockets of their foreign clothes, and strange ideas disturbing to their parents. Time was, within my memory, when children of the Mountain mocked at Frankish trousers, shouting: "Hi, O my uncle, you have come in two!" But to-day all that is changed. Young native Christians wear cheap German slops to show their progress; they doff the fez when entering a house, an action formerly esteemed the greatest rudeness; they wear loud creaking boots, which are the mode out there, to advertise the difference from old-fashioned slippers; they decipher the Latin character more easily than the Arabic, and corrupt their mother-tongue with French and English; so that one forebodes that, in a few years' time, the ancient dignity of these people and their individuality will be found only among the Druzes and the Mohammedans.

A poor peasant of the province of Kesarawân,

in Mount Lebanon, a Maronite of the Maronites, and fanatical in that faith, nevertheless contrived to have his children taught by English Protestants. The boy, Selîm, then completed his education at the Jesuit college in Beyrout, while the girls, Affeh and Zeydeh, returned to their village, to the faith and practice of the Maronites. Every Christian in Syria at that time looked to Egypt as an Eldorado. Selîm resorted thither, his studies finished, and obtained a clerkship in a good commercial house then opening operations in the newly conquered Sûdân. For three years he had worked there, in a trying climate, when tidings of his father's illness reached him; and he journeyed home, only to find the old man dead and buried. His sisters being averse to village life, he sold the inheritance for a little ready money, and took a lodging in Beyrout—a single room at the top of a tall new house in a decent quarter, which boasted a small balcony overlooking the street.

The girls — big, white-skinned, black-browed beauties, each with a profusion of dark hair plaited in a solid tail behind—were enraptured with the sojourn in the city, home of culture and of elegance. In the mornings they performed the housework in the intervals of their toilette, pouring their slops superbly off the balcony; in the afternoons they sat out, gracefully attired, and watched the carriages full of fashionables go jolting and swaying down the rugged street beneath; they cooked the mess of rice or lentils for their brother's supper; and then all three sat out under the stars and sang together, choosing Frankish airs for fashion. The frowning

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mountains seen above the roofs seemed to the girls a prison-house from which they had at last escaped.

But Selîm was not so happy. He could get no work, and was loth to return to the Sûdân, which, now that he was back in Syria, appeared a perilous and very distant country. Moreover, he adored his sisters, and would not entertain the thought of leaving them. He prayed to Allah and the saints continually, and neglected none of those superstitious observances which have been proved conducive to good fortune. Yet none came to him. Each morning he set forth with hope renewed, but every evening saw that hope demolished.

One morning he was starting, light of heart, singing "Tra-la-la" in the Frankish manner, as his sisters had been doing overnight, when his foot slipped on the top step of the stairs and he sat down suddenly. The stone was hard. "O Lord!" he cried, and crossed himself, striving to rise; but the effort came too late. Again he bumped a step, again he crossed himself and called on Allah; and so on down the flight of fourteen steps.

A philosopher, who lived on the floor below, looked out of his doorway at sound of the first impact and ejaculation, and watched with interest the subsequent descent, in appearance so deliberate, and yet involuntary.

"Allah is merciful!" he asserted gravely when Selîm finally landed at his feet. "Another time thou wouldst do well to name the Name and cross thyself before descending, and then look well to thy going. Now enter my abode and rest awhile with praise to Allah. Thou mightest have broken a limb or even

killed thyself. Of a verity we sons of Adam are extremely fragile; our life is at the mercy of a sudden fall, a shot, a spark, a poisonous wind." So saying, he led the dazed young man into his room and shut the door again.

The room was most untidy, being strewn with sheets of newspaper, most of which showed signs of having been cut with scissors. Under the window was a little pile of books.

"Behold, my son, the scene of labours which will benefit posterity," remarked the owner with a flourish of his hand. He was an elderly man, clad in a tattered silken robe and a soiled tarbûsh. The skin of his face was almost coffee-coloured and seemed very dry, as if its vital moisture had all gone to fertilise the grey moustache, which was bushy, drooping, and extremely prominent. A pair of gold-rimmed spectacles lent to his deep-set eyes mysterious wisdom. He smiled self-consciously. "Know, O my son, that I am engaged upon a mighty work—no less than a comparison of all the nations of the world, their manners, customs, laws, and form of government, compiled from Arabic authorities. For this cause do I study all these journals, sent to me weekly by a friend in Egypt, since they often give strange facts concerning foreigners. Now eat some leben and some bread. It is a known specific where the nerves are shaken. As the learned Abu Kûseh has it in his golden verse :

"A modicum of soured white juice of cow or goat in association
with the produce of the oven,
'Engenders in him who engulfs it tranquillity of mind and
equilibrium.'"

Selîm accepted gratefully and ate with gusto, sitting on the divan, at his learned host's right hand.

"What is thy name; thy business?" cried the latter suddenly.

Selîm told his story briefly, and complained much of the difficulty he experienced in finding work.

"Well, return to the Sûdân to thy former post!" counselled the philosopher. "Here there is too much Frankish education such as thine. Only the Muslimîn still study Arabic. Return to the Sûdân therefor; thou hast no chance here."

"I cannot, O my uncle. The climate of the Sûdân is most insalubrious. I suffered much from boils—a great calamity. It is health before all things here below, since Allah only grants to us one life."

"Well said," applauded the philosopher. "Thy wisdom is beyond thy years. Alas, how many do we see in this world who barter health and virtue for the chance of gain? Now look at me! I have here in this room a priceless book, hand-written, which contains the true secret history of the world from the burial of our father Adam till the crucifixion. Were I to show that book to the Doctor Adisûn of the American college, he would cover me with gold to let him have it. I do not show it; I despise the dross of this world. . . . Then why not go to America?" he added after some reflection.

"How can I leave my sisters here defenceless? Besides, my soul abhors the thought of foreign lands. I suffered much from boils when in the Sûdân."

"Well, hast thou no rich friend whom thou canst flatter? As the homely proverb puts it: 'Kiss the

dog on the mouth, till you have got what you want from him.'"

"There is one to whom I would attach myself—a young chief of the Drûz, by name Hasan Bey Abdul Melik, who leads a gay life in the city here. He lets me feed with his servants and follow in his train of courtiers, but has paid no heed to me."

"Ha ! It is plain we must devise some stratagem. Hast thou any gift of wit or comicality ? The learned and polite Marcûc, that best of poets, having failed to gain preferment by his poetry, one day made laughable grimaces in the presence of his lord, with the result that the monarch filled his mouth with gold and flung on him a robe of honour. Thou mightst do likewise with thy young Druze. Fear not, I will give thought to it ; we must devise some stratagem."

"With thy permission, I must now be going," said Selîm. "May Allah reward thy kindness to a stranger. Deign to honour our poor dwelling in the evening. My sisters are well educated and conversable. They sing most rarely in the Frankish manner."

"Be sure that I shall do myself the honour. Go in peace, my son."

Out in the street, in the sunlight, the Frankish tune once more recurred to Selîm, and he sang "Tra-la-la-la !" from a constricted throat. Not everyone could make a noise like that ; he felt flattered by the stare of passers-by ; but when he had been refused employment at three likely places, his spirits sank and he remembered the bad omen of his fall downstairs. It was with relief that, towards noon, he approached the town house of the young Druze

sheykh. There, at any rate, he was sure of getting what he went for, which was food.

It was a tall house with a roof of scarlet tiles, walls painted a rich blue, and monstrous plate-glass windows which flamed at sunset far across the sea. Twelve orange-trees in tubs adorned the entrance court; in which and in the entry lounged a crowd of suitors—youths of the town in Frankish clothes and fezzes, who aspired to be companions of the great man's pleasures, and Druzes from the Mountain in striped cloaks and snowy turbans, who had business with the chieftain or his steward. Selîm waited to kiss the hand of Hasan Bey as his lordship crossed the courtyard on his way to lunch, before he joined the servants at their meal.

Hasan Bey Abdul Melik was eighteen years old, generous, high-spirited, and beautiful. The hair that showed beneath his fez was black and curly, his complexion a clear olive readily suffused, and his dark blue eyes were quick to answer any challenge. He had come to Beyrout on purpose to enjoy himself; and the aged steward of his house accompanied him to restrict his enjoyment to the bounds of decency. For the Druzes are so prudish as a nation that the least taste of wine or arac in the mouth, the smoking of a single cigarette, disqualifies a man from entering their secret councils. As yet Hasan had done nothing obnoxious to their scruples; and it was hoped that he might live to be initiated, which great nobles who indulge their lust can never be. At present his chief amusement consisted in walking in the streets, instead of riding, attended by a mob of sycophants whom he treated with good-natured contempt.

That afternoon, as he strolled by the sea-shore, Selîm was in the crowd escorting him. The young Maronite suddenly espied his sisters. Alarmed at encountering so great a crowd of men, the two girls had shrunk close to the wall, and were trying to hide their faces with their black lace head-veils. He stopped to speak to them, and was amazed when they moved on to find that the whole procession had stopped likewise. The voice of Hasan Bey cried :

“Who is it? Tell me quickly !”

And one replied : “It is Selîm the Maronite, a son of nothing.”

Then obsequious hands seized hold of the astonished youth and thrust him forward till he stood before the young Druze chief.

“Thy face is known to me, but not thy story,” said the latter kindly. “They tell me thou art poor, and dost support thy sisters—a good action. Is it true ?”

“It is true, O my lord the bey.”

“And are those two thy sisters whom we passed just now.”

“Yes, O my lord the bey.”

“What is the name of the taller of the two ?”

“Afifeh, O my lord the bey.”

“Well, O Khawâjah Selîm, I have an offer to make to thee. I love the lady Afifeh with an urgent love. I will pay thee a hundred pounds, and keep her in luxury. What sayest thou ?”

Selîm could say nothing for a minute, for the rush of blood to his head. At last he managed to articulate : “It is a sin—against my honour,” and walked off in dudgeon.

“Thy honour! What hast thou to do with

honour?" exclaimed the nobleman in pure amazement.

"Art mad, or what, to reject unheard-of fortune?" whispered a lickspittle at Selîm's ear.

But, in spite of all his urban affectations, Selîm remained a native of the Mountain, and averse to infamy. He went home, divided between shame and anger, ascribing the outrage to which he had been subjected chiefly to his fall downstairs that morning.

He found his sisters seated on the tiny balcony, the philosopher behind them, squatting just within the room. The last-named rose upon his entrance, observing:

"I have already made acquaintance with these ladies, as thou seest."

"What luck, O Selîm?" inquired Zeydeh.

"None at all," Selîm confessed dejectedly. "And you, have you not heard of anything?"

The sisters had been to visit some English missionary ladies to whom they had obtained an introduction. They had been charmed by the respect with which those ladies treated them, giving them dignities in Arabic to which, being low-born, they were not entitled; and otherwise fulfilling every detail of the most extravagant Oriental politeness; but, in fact, had gained nothing by the interview.

Owing to the multiplying of mission schools and colleges, there were now too many educated women seeking posts as teachers.

"It is the same story always. Things are bad," Selîm suspired. "Our money is almost spent. Allah help us, for I know not what to do."

"Despair not, O my son!" said the philosopher.

"I have thought on thy business since our talk this morning, and have gathered certain stories from of old for thy instruction. Here is one of them :—

"It is related of the clever Camr-ud-dîn, who became king of a country among the islands of Sind and of Hind, that, being in his boyhood destitute and at the same time ambitious, he devised the following stratagem. He stole a saucepan from his neighbour's house and sold it; then, with the money—which was very little—in a purse, he repaired to a certain merchant famed for absent-mindedness, and begged him to take charge of a purse containing two dînârs. The merchant at once consented, flung the purse into a box with other moneys, and called on the bystanders to witness the deposit. Later that same day the clever one returned and demanded his purse containing two dînârs. The merchant flung it to him. He opened it; it contained but three dirhems. Then he cried so loudly that he had been robbed, that the merchant, though he saw the fraud, made up the money for the sake of his reputation. With the gold thus obtained, Camr-ud-dîn purchased merchandise, which he sold again to such profit that in a week he had returned the saucepan to its owner, the gold to the merchant, yet kept much in hand. Thus, by force of cleverness and bold invention was laid the foundation of a splendid fortune."

"Capital!" cried the two girls. "Our brother too is clever. He could deal as wisely. Tell us some more strange stories, O khawâjah."

The philosopher complied with a store of anecdotes, which grew more and more facetious as the day wore on, till Selîm himself was lured from his despondency

to join the laughter which those tales provoked. The philosopher shared their supper of rice and olives, after which the girls sang Frankish songs, "Tra-la-la!" ogling the stars above the Beyrout roofs.

Next day Selîm went out to look for work as usual. He avoided the palace of the young Druze sheykh. When he returned towards evening, Afîfeh called to him :

"I have seen thy friend. He rode past here on a splendid horse, and smiled up to me especially. By Allah, he is lovely as an angel."

"He is no friend, but an ill-wisher. Never speak of him again," he answered sternly.

Afîfeh turned away as one sore wounded.

The little store of money was exhausted; their credit would not last a week; and still there seemed no prospect of employment. Selîm became morose and very irritable; he often wept at night. His friend the philosopher tried to cheer him, saying :

"The man who possesses his own soul is a great proprietor; the lord of great possessions is a slave. That is the opinion of the learned Ibn Adas. Look at me! I have here a book that, if but shown to Doctor Adisûn at the American college, would bring me a hundred pounds, perhaps more. Yet, if deprived of it to-morrow, I should not be downcast. Be patient, O my son, devise some stratagem!"

Selîm tried hard to obey, but could think of no scheme more hopeful than that related of the clever Camr-ud-dîn. He determined, in despair, to try its efficacy. Descending the stairs one morning, he found the philosopher's door wide open, his room empty. He entered and, searching through the pile

of books below the window, abstracted the rare manuscript so often shown to him, and hid it under his coat. He was going to show it to Doctor Edison of the American college ; and, if his luck but equalled that of Camr-ud-dîn, would return it to its rightful owner in a week. Running down the lowest flight of stairs into the street, he knocked against the philosopher, who was carrying a bowl of leben.

"Curse thy father!" cried the sage, exasperated, seeing half the curds were spilt. He added when Selîm was almost out of earshot : "Haste is from the devil."

Selîm walked as fast as he could to the American college, and there craved audience of Dr Edison. After an hour's delay he obtained it quite by accident. The doctor was pointed out to him by one of the students, in the act of flying from one building to another. Selîm ran and intercepted him. The doctor cried : "No, no! I have no time!" and was going to push him aside when, spying an ancient manuscript, his face softened. He took the book from Selîm's hand and turned the pages.

"What wouldst thou with it?" he inquired.

"I would sell it now, at once."

"It is worth a pound at least; I have not that sum with me. Come to my house in an hour."

"A pound only!" gasped Selîm. But by then the doctor had fled out of hearing.

The homeward way seemed long and tedious to Selîm, deprived of the hope which had inspired his going out. He carried the book in his hands, in sight of all men, forgetting he had ever thought to steal it. With alarm he saw a little crowd before the

doorway of his house, surrounding the philosopher, who gesticulated like a madman. Hurrying to learn the cause of the commotion, he found his throat seized by the sage's bony hand, the book snatched from his grasp.

"So thou art the thief, O accursed, O unnatural malefactor—thou whom I befriended, whom I loved and cherished! Come with me before the judge, this minute. Thou shalt be cast into prison for this shameful crime."

"But the book is in thy hand; it is not stolen," wailed Selîm. "I did but show it to the Doctor Adisûn. He says that it is worth an English pound."

"He said that! Dost thou tell me he said that?—the miscreant, the traitor, the unblushing liar! But he did not examine it fully—say, now did he? Come to my room and tell me all that passed."

Alone with the sage, Selîm fell down at his feet, confessing :

"Allah witness, I am at the last gasp. I know not where to find enough to purchase daily bread. So I bethought me of thy story of the clever Camr-ud-dîn, and took the book, hoping to sell it for a hundred pounds, and with that money speculate upon the Bourse and make a fortune. Allah witness I intended to restore it to thee in a few hours' time. Moreover, thou has assured me more than once that it would not grieve thy soul to be deprived of it——"

"I meant by some cataclysm or calamity, as of fire or flood or war," put in the philosopher reproachfully. "The hand of God is one thing, the hand of man another : bear in mind."

"O, my uncle, I implore thy forgiveness. Behold me destitute, with two dear angels trusting to me. O Allah, take my life, for it is useless."

"Tush, O my son! Be patient! Think but a minute; let us devise some stratagem. What of that sheykh of the Drûz of whom thou once didst speak to me?"

"I have forsworn his company these many days. He made a proposal which impugned my honour. He wished to buy my sister for a hundred pounds."

"Ah, did he so, the libidinous wretch, the devastator? That explains why he rides by each day on his thoroughbred horse, passing and repassing this house a score of times. . . . Nevertheless, O my son, a hundred pounds is hard to come by openly; and love is credulous and easily beguiled. By giving him the hope and placing obstacles, thou couldst perhaps extract the money without harm to thy sister. Thou hast a precedent in the case of the learned Fustuc el Halebi and his wife Dibs. A certain merchant of the richest loved this Dibs and pursued her. She complained of his persecutions to her husband, who, instead of getting angry in the way of fools, sought how to turn the matter to his own advantage. By means of his wife he lured the merchant to his house and there played merry tricks on him, involving his discomfiture in divers ways as well as the loss of nearly half his substance. In the end, the woman having wrought him to the verge of madness and got from him a heap of priceless gems, I recollect she squirted benj into his nostrils, and while he slept, departed with her husband. The knowledge of benj is lost to us degenerate, but at any pharmacy thou

couldst obtain a soporific to still the rascal if he got too dangerous."

"But, O my uncle, is it not dishonourable?"

"Honour," sings the poet Bêdinjân el Mahshi, "is the rose-water of the opulent. The hungry cannot stop to wash their hands. Return to-day to thy patron, as one repentant. Say thou thyself art willing, but the girl is very shy. Entreat him to do nothing to alarm her modesty. Lay stress upon thy poverty, and thy obedience to his will in all things."

"It shall be as thou sayest," exclaimed Selîm with bitter resolution; and went out from the conference with teeth set. Weeping, he turned his face towards the southern quarter of the city, where towered the blue-walled, red-roofed palace of the Abdul Meliks. Its plate-glass windows were already flaming in the sunset. The people at the door, impressed by his wretched appearance, which seemed to bespeak grave tidings, procured him an immediate audience.

Hasan Bey was lolling on a divan in his private room, consulting with the aged steward, who sat humbly at his feet. At sight of Selîm, he asked his cause of grief.

"My errand is a private one," the suppliant murmured.

"I have no secrets from the Sheykh Muhammad. He is my soul," remarked the boy with dignity. "Hast thou changed thy mind with respect to thy sister, the lady Afifeh? By Allah, in that case we will dry thy tears with benefits."

"Allah knows my shame!" Selîm blubbered. "Only most pressing need has brought me to it. O my lord, if thou canst win her consent, then take her."

But she is very shy, and must be wooed politely. Honour our poor dwelling when it pleases thee. O Allah Most High, forgive me !”

He buried his face in his hands.

“Give him ten pounds !” the bey commanded his major-domo. “I will visit thy house privately this very evening, O khawâjah.”

The Sheykh Muhammad shook some gold coins out of a silken purse, and counted ten of them into Selîm’s palm. That old grey-bearded sheykh, black-cloaked and white-turbaned, then put questions, shrewd and searching, to Selîm concerning his sister’s education and accomplishments, her age, her previous conduct ; till the young Christian marvelled at the depravity, thus evidenced, of a man so respectable in appearance.

“It is well,” he said in conclusion, “now go in safety, for our lord is busy.”

Selîm, thus dismissed, returned through the twilight streets. “Alas,” thought he, “to what vile depths can poverty degrade the righteous.” But with ten pounds in his pocket he felt much more comfortable.

On his way upstairs he looked in on the philosopher, announcing :

“All goes well. My one misgiving arises from the presence at his lordship’s ear of a wise counsellor, the Sheykh Muhammad, steward of his household. The sheykh is wily, and his lordship hearkens to him. I fear he may suspect our purpose and defeat it.”

“Fear nothing,” rejoined the sage with a transcendent smile, “seeing that thou also hast a counsellor. With all the wisdom of the ancients at my beck and

call, am I not more than a match for an astute barbarian?"

Selîm pursued his way upstairs, and told his sisters of the stratagem he had devised.

"This sheykh of the Drûz desires thee," he informed Afifeh; "he has offered to buy thee from me—O the insult! Now we will be avenged on him, and at the same time obtain much money for our needs. I pretend to accept his offer; he comes here to-night; show him a little favour, make his love grow. And thou, O Zeydeh, help to get things ready!"

"Be certain I will do my best to charm him," said Afifeh, laughing gaily. "O the wretch, to plan such wickedness, with that angel's face! Ah, we will punish him!"

Selîm gave them one of his gold pieces, wherewith to buy choice sweetstuff for the entertainment, and also candles to light up the lodging. Zeydeh went downstairs to do the shopping, while Afifeh decked the room and donned her best apparel, all the while singing "Tra-la-la" in the best Frankish manner, seeming light of heart.

Hardly were the preparations finished ere the young Druze knocked at the door. Selîm opened to him, and performed the introduction. His Honour was conducted to a throne of cushions placed in readiness, where the two girls plied him with sweetmeats, of which he ate but little, seeming very nervous. To put him at his ease, Selîm then bade his sisters sing a Frankish song; but the effect of the performance upon Hasan Bey was unexpected. When the two girls flung their heads back and began

their "Tra-la-las" from tightened throats, his Highness strove at first to keep his countenance, he gulped, he pressed a hand to his mouth, but at length exploded, fairly rolling on the floor for stress of laughter. The singing stopped in horror.

"Pardon! I ask pardon!" the young bey gasped out, trying with all his might to summon gravity. "But, by Allah, never in my life heard I a noise one half so funny."

"It is the music of Europe, O my lord!" Afifeh pouted.

"There is no music in it!" the bey chuckled. "Leave it, O queen of beauty, to the Europeans, to professional jokers. Sing thou sweet love-songs of our native land."

Directly after coffee had been served, he rose to go.

"So soon?" exclaimed Afifeh and Selim together.

"With your permission, I will come again tomorrow. I am not well this evening." The truth was he still wrestled with a wish to laugh.

"Thou hast beheld his rudeness, his contempt for us—this heathen! By Allah, he is no better than a wild beast!" said Selim when he was gone.

Next morning, at the housework, there was no more "Tra-la-la!" The sisters cooed soft Arab songs while they were dressing. In the afternoon the young bey reappeared, this time with less embarrassment in his demeanour. Afifeh sat down near him, temptingly. To give her a chance to play upon him, Selim went out and leaned upon the railing of the balcony. Two Druzes, whom he recognised as of the young chief's household, sat out on stools before

a coffee-house across the way. Here and there, all down the street, appeared white turbans on the heads of idlers. At least a score of Druzes loitered within call. With a shudder, Selim turned back into the room. Young Hasan held Afifeh in his arms, his lips were glued to hers. The world was blackened in her brother's eyes. The malefactor, the young brute, was growing dangerous. The benj, the soporific, must be bought at once.

As his shadow fell across the room, they sprang apart. Afifeh's face was red, her eyes downcast. Her aspect stabbed Selim to the heart. It seemed a mute reproach of him, her brother, for compelling her to play a part so ignominious.

The cause of all this grief was unabashed. "I shall sup here, O khawâjah. Of thy kindness, go and buy provisions of the best," he said as to a servant, at the same time tossing to Selim a piece of gold.

The master of the house could not refuse, for had he not promised to obey in all things the will of this abandoned bey; and though loth to leave Afifeh at the young dog's mercy, he was glad to be spared the spectacle of her martyrdom. Zeydeh at least was with her, and he felt a crying need to speak with the philosopher. So he went quickly.

"Tell me, O my more than father," he cried as he burst into the sage's room, "where I can buy the drug of which thou spakest! It is time I had it, for the beast grows violent."

"I will come with thee. We will make inquiry at the pharmacy." The philosopher, who had been reading in a book, rose up and joined him.

At the street-door they brushed against a man,

whom Selîm recognised as the Sheykh Muhammad, steward of the household of the Abdul Meliks. He clutched the philosopher's arm, and whispered :

"Look around thee! See how many of the Drûz! They guard the house while he is here. Did anything befall him they would take immediate vengeance. How then can he be drugged without discovery?"

"Fear nothing! Has not our house two doors? As the eloquent Abu Kifteh sang of old: 'Two doors are of the essence of good building as for human kind, for vice and virtue call in opposite directions, and no man living but is swayed by each in turn.' First ascertain that the young lord has money on him, then drug him and escape with that money, thou and the ladies with thee, by the back-door. He will not pursue you hotly, since the laugh will be against him, the shame his."

Thus conversing, they arrived at the pharmacy, where, under colour of a friend who could not sleep for headache, they inquired the properties of divers drugs, and at length bought one adapted to their purpose. They were returning with this treasure, when Selîm remembered the errand with which Hasan Bey had charged him to provide choice food. He turned back, therefor, his friend with him, to a cookshop, where there was more delay; the philosopher insisted upon tasting every dainty that the place afforded and discoursing learnedly of its effect and history, quoting poetry in support of his assertions; so that it was more than an hour from the moment of their setting forth ere they again drew near the house. Selîm felt gravely anxious for Afifeh. Scarcely hearing the philosopher remark,

with praise to Allah, that the street was purged of Druzes, he dashed up the stairs in advance of his friend, who, having seen the dainties purchased, intended to go up and help to eat them.

He found Zeydeh alone, in tears.

"She is gone, O Selîm!" cried the young girl distractedly. "No sooner didst thou leave the house than he took her down to a carriage. An old man of his people got in with her. They drove towards the mountain. He went to join his horses and attendants; by this time he is at her side. He told me not to weep; no harm should come to her. He seems to love her truly. She went willingly."

Selîm had staggered back against the wall, letting his parcels fall. He stared at his sister stupidly, repeating:

"Willingly. . . ."

The philosopher, who had come up, puffing and blowing, in time to catch the gist of Zeydeh's outcry, now observed:

"The proper course for thee to take is doubtless that which the learned Ibn Batîkha adopted when they stole his wife. He went to a place of concourse and there cried aloud till the whole city was commoved with his distress, and rose to help him."

"Curse thy religion!" Selîm flashed on him suddenly. "Thou, and no other, art the cause of all my shame. How can I cry in public, when my conduct has been criminal?"

"Control thy temper, O my son; though I can make allowances for one placed suddenly in such a plight. What thou sayest is quite true; we must avoid publicity. Our project has recoiled upon our

own heads. As a poet of old has well said : 'My dagger is the light of my eyes when inserted in the belly of my enemy; but when it pricks my hand I curse its parentage.' By thy life, I know not what to advise save patience."

He continued in this strain through half the night, partaking with Zeydeh of the dainties they had brought home with them, while Selîm kept moaning, little heeding what was said or done. When he retired at length, it was with the promise to return early in the morning and resume his consolations. In this respect he proved as good as his word. By the second hour after sunrise he was again at Selîm's ear, sermonising; and at the third hour after noon he was still declaiming, citing learned instances of bitter grief, when there came a loud knock at the door.

Zeydeh opened it. An old Druze entered, making reverence. Selîm sprang to his feet, and stood glaring at the intruder, teeth and hands clenched, quivering in every limb.

"Curse thy father! Art thou not ashamed to come here, to the house thou hast dishonoured?" he said huskily.

"Nay, nay!" cried the philosopher, as one much scandalised. "Curse not a man who has saluted thee with courtesy. For what is the first rule of politeness: 'Return a compliment with interest, and then to converse.'"

He might have spoken to the air. The Sheykh Muhammad had his eyes fixed on Selîm. He answered proudly:

"Why speak of dishonour, when thou hast greater honour than ever fell to the lot of dog like thee.